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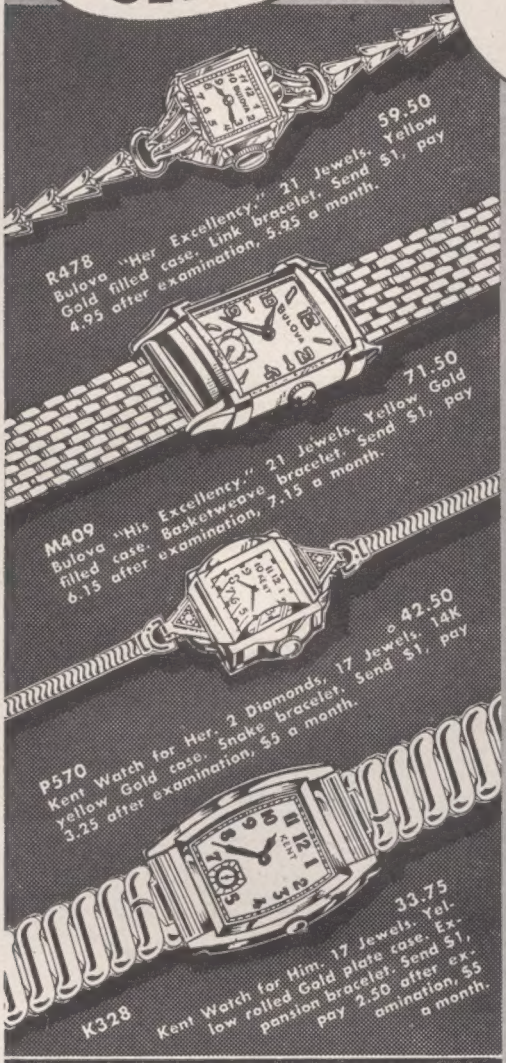

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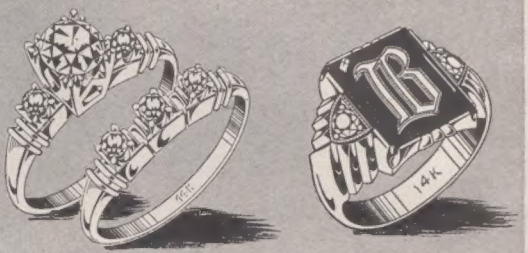

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Adventure

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Vol. 118, No. 6 for **April, 1948** **Best of New Stories**

THE NOVELETTE

Thunder in the North ..... R. G. EMERY 8

To Johnny McQueen, crouched in an alder-and-willow thicket in the foothills of the Aleutian Range, the Alaskan Brown framed in the sights of his cut-down .30-'06 looked only two sizes smaller than a house. But to McQueen's hunting partner the brute only reminded him of bigger game. General Douglas, G-2, U.S.A., wasn't interested in bruin except as a means of involving McQueen in another kind of hunt. For there are bears that walk like men along the shores of Kotzebue Sound to the north of our Alaskan frontier—and they're playing a dangerous game for keeps and not for sport behind an ice-cold curtain of iron.

SHORT STORIES

Shadrach and Sin ..... BENNETT FOSTER 56

You can't gamble and play cards—and work for us! You can't drink and get drunk—and work for us! You can't swear and use profane language —and work for us! Those were the drovers' rules, posted in no uncertain terms on the endgate of the Barlow & Givens chuck wagon, and they were meant to apply to young Shad Thursday as well as every other hand who rode north from Texas in the dust cloud kicked up by the seventy-two hundred hooves of the Diamond Dot herd. The fact that he disobeyed every last one of those rules before the drive was over—and consorted with the Devil to boot—may have had something to do with his startling success as a cowhand. Draw your own conclusions!

Blue Fury ..... JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS 66

Peter Pierce had a tough time getting aboard the *Swordfishing King* as harpooner in the first place, but that was nothing to what he had to contend with after he got the job. The skipper rode the kid unmercifully, despite the fact that he was by all odds the best man at the job we'd ever had. Maybe the lad was just a bit too good to please a jealous old man who'd once been the king of them all.

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OUT ON APRIL 9TH ◆ ◆ ◆

The Whip ..... VIC SPIES 83
Arranda, Delgado, Montoya, Cardozo—all had vanished without trace. Now Escobar, their successor as commandant of the concentration camp, had arrived to take over his new post. And he would get at the truth of those strange disappearances—if he had to flog every last one of his charges to death!

Trout Poisoning ..... ROBERT GRIFFITH 86
Pa always made fun of me for bringing home little trout, so I made up my mind I'd show him. Castor oil is sure a great remedy for fish stories and I took my medicine like a man.

Mr. Third Engineer ..... ETHAN GRANT 116
With a weak-kneed skipper, a lunkhead for a mate, a doddering chief, fire in her bunkers and a hold full of explosive naphtha the *Howanna*, out of New York, was headed for Buenos Aires—and trouble. It was lucky Mr. Sturdy was aboard, for nothing short of perfection would satisfy that paragon of the engine room—whether the ship sank or not.

Four-Letter Word (an off-the-trail story) ..... FREDRIC BROWN 123
The greatest single poem in the whole English language? . . . Well, that covers a lot of territory but Rupert Gardin, dean of critics, had no hesitation whatever in naming it. Was it by Keats, Shelley, Milton, the Immortal Bard? . . . No indeed! A shipwrecked beach-comber, a veritable modern Crusoe named Marney had distilled that magic essence of the Muse which was, like the soul of wit—brief.

THE SERIAL

Ghost-Mine Gold (2nd of 4 parts) ..... STEVE FRAZEE 88
One bruising bare-fist donnybrook, two warnings to get out of town in a hurry, one attempt on his life from ambush by parties unknown—that was the score to date after Rigdon Sadar's first day in Sylvanite. It was obvious that if he ever expected to recover those twenty-seven sacks of calaverite before the week was over he'd have to hurry—or be as dead as the abandoned mine workings where the fabulous fortune was hidden.

THE FACT STORY

The King and the Cockney Slave ..... MURRAY MORGAN 76
Being a true account of the strange experiences of John Jewitt, ship's armourer on the *Boston*, one of two survivors of the massacre of that ship's entire complement by King Maquina of Vancouver Island. . . . His two years' servitude as slave to the regal Nootka and eventual escape by means of a letter of introduction—dictated but not read.

DEPARTMENTS

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Ask Adventure ..... Information you can't get elsewhere 128
Ask Adventure Experts ..... The men who furnish it 136
Lost Trails ..... Where old paths cross 143
The Trail Ahead ..... News of next month's issue 138

Cover painted for Adventure *by Peter Stevens*
Kenneth S. White, Editor

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

TO ACCOMPANY his new Johnny McQueen novelette on page 8 this month, R. G. Emery, (who was stationed in Alaska for three years during the war, you'll recall), sends along the following—

The first time I came in contact with the Russians in Alaska was shortly after the Lend-Lease air route through Edmonton, Fairbanks and Nome was opened. The comrades took over the planes in Fairbanks and flew them out by way of Nome. I was meandering down Fourth Avenue in Anchorage one evening and bumped into Russell Annabel, the big-game writing man, who was then UP correspondent for the territory. He told me that the new Russian CO at Nome was in town, staying at one of the hotels. Annabel was on his way up to see him and get a story. He invited me along.

There were two comrades in the room, the lieutenant colonel CO and his captain adjutant. We bowed all around and Annabel unwrapped a fifth of Johnny Walker which he had brought along as a diplomatic gift and ice-breaker. He handed it to the colonel, who passed it back to the captain. The captain pulled the cork and handed it back.

The colonel looked around at us, counting to himself, "One, two, three, four, eh?" Then he put his thumb a quarter of the way down the bottle, about even with Johnny's white weskit, tilted it up and drank down to his thumb, brought the bottle down and handed it to me!

On another occasion I encountered them at Adak in the Aleutians. The Russians were sending us a shipload of lumber and the rumor spread that part of the crew on the expected vessel were women. Real, live women! Some of the boys hadn't seen one in three years.

So when the ship came in—and a rusty, scummy old tub she was—of the 15,000 or so troops on the station, 14,999 (one man had just been operated on for appendicitis that morning and the medics wouldn't let him up) were down around the docks waiting for her and them.

It turned out to be a great disappointment to one and all. Not that the rumor hadn't been true. It was. Even the skipper herself was a female. The catch was that nobody could tell, by looking, which was which. One of them, so help me, had a full beard!

The sort of things I describe in "Thunder in the North" certainly *could* happen in Alaska—may yet—but I don't know that they *have*. We were forced to keep a good many known commies on duty during the war, and time alone can tell what harm they managed to do.

OF "Shadrach and Sin" on page 56 Bennett Foster says—

As a rule I don't like to use Indian Agents for villains. Most Indian Service people I know are hard-working citizens who do their level damndest on the job. Of course, in reading Dodge, Wissler and others a good deal of bad business is mentioned and so I am not out of line in using the character in the story. Nor am I out of line about Shadrach. Many a puncher came up the trail with about his background and in his frame of mind.

Incidentally, the notice on the wagon is authentic, only the names varying from actuality.

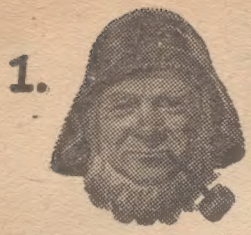
THREE additions to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month. Vic Spies, who gives us "The Whip" on page 83, confesses on mustering in—

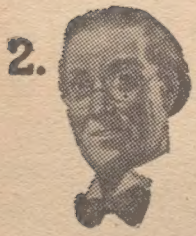
I have never set boot in Rio de Oro. For all I could unearth (save what I shall relate presently), aside from some 35-40,000 estimated native population, few others have, excepting 30,000 nomadic Arabs and Arabized Berbers who, with their flocks, enter from the Sahara after the rainy season.

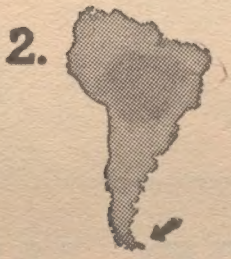
Spanish Headquarters at Villa Cisneros is credited with 500-odd whites and has an air station. The territories of Rio de Oro and Sekia el Hamra are better known as Spanish Morocco, and Spain's chief advantage derived from its possession of the country is its convenience to the Canary Islands fishermen.

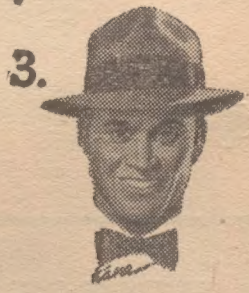
Years ago I used to bunk with a Major Rivers (credited by Richard Harding Davis), an old Boer War British officer and an earl

(Continued on page139)









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THUNDER IN THE NORTH

By
R. G. EMERY

I TELL you, McQueen," General Douglas said, "the time is right now! It's getting later every day—every minute!"

The September wind, straight off the Bering Sea by way of Bristol Bay, plucked at the short hair on the nape of McQueen's neck with icicle fingers. McQueen pulled his neck into the collar of his coat as far as it would go, wishing he had some turtle blood, and muttered. Joe Douglas and he had been friends and flying mates for ten years, peace and war, and McQueen did not belittle the man's intelligence nor, from his seat at close hand to the powers in Washington, his sources of information.

Nevertheless, he was a nuisance and McQueen told him so. "This is a bear hunt, dammit! Try and remember that, and let me alone."

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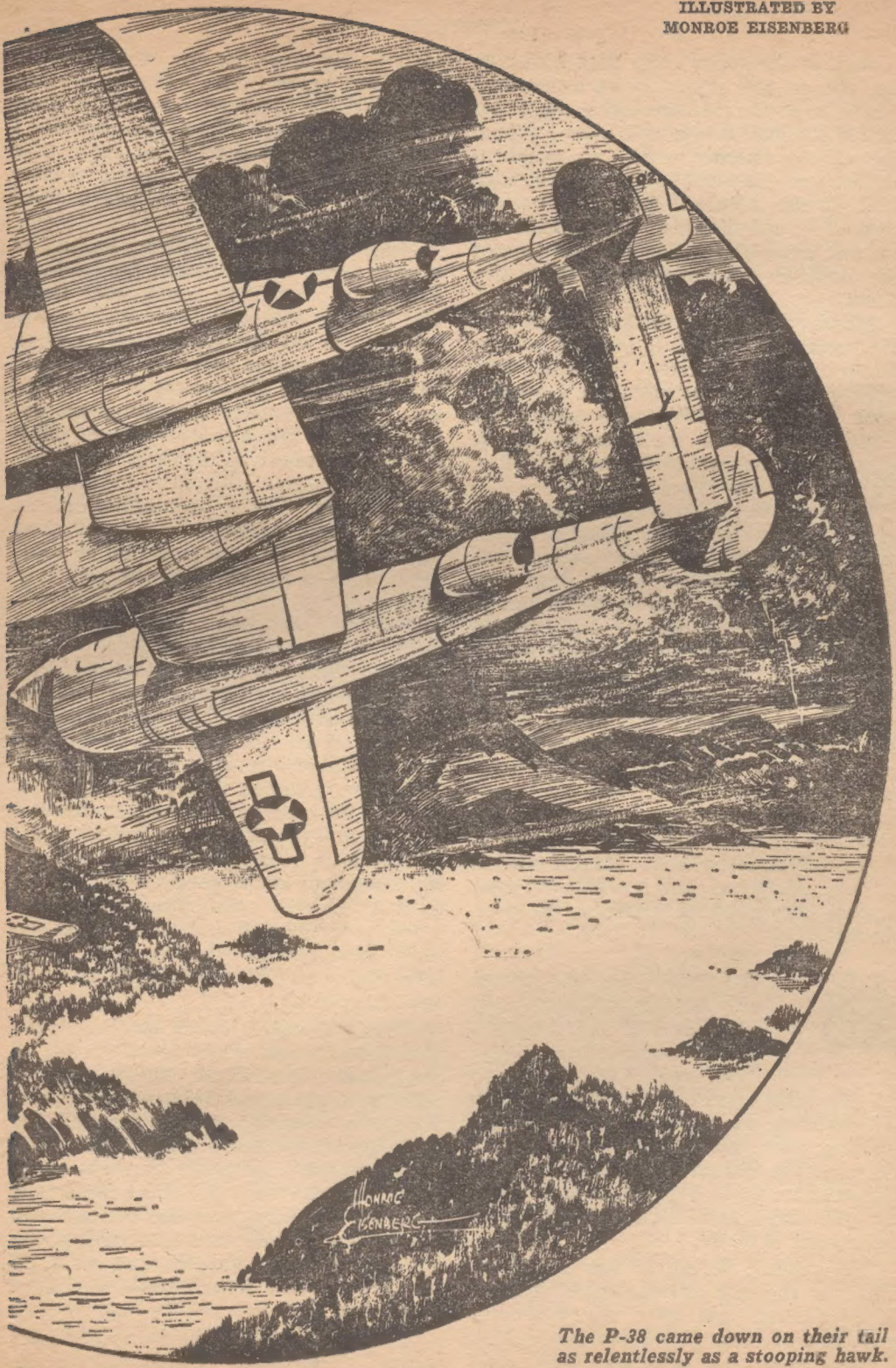
MONROE EISENBERG



The P-38 came down on their tail as relentlessly as a stooping hawk.

Back of the grassy ridge on which they lay, the ground sloped down a hundred feet or so to the tide-flats along the upper end of Kvichak Bay, a mile away. Ahead, the country climbed over a succession of similar grass-carpeted hogbacks to the foothills of the Aleutian Range, buttressed mightily in the distance. Between the elevations, alder and willow thickets fringed the little water-courses along the valley floors.

It was one of those thickets which held McQueen's attention. It grew on a little hump almost directly opposite him, around which the stream made a buttonhook bend. The alders were patchy and beginning to shed their leaves, letting glimpses of the reddish-yellow grass show through. Or was it grass?

McQueen put the binoculars to his eyes again and tried to decide. Douglas, buried in the red-top an arm's length away, broke in again. His handsome profile was frozen to the stock of his cut-down .30-'06 and he seemed to be ready. But he wasn't letting himself be side-tracked. General Joe's principal quarry on this trip was lying right beside him, and it wasn't a bear. You don't make your brigadier's stars in the Pentagon Panzers at thirty-five by ever allowing yourself to be distracted from the main business at hand. Even if the distracting influence happens to be an Alaskan Brown bear only two sizes smaller than a house.

"Leave you alone, hell! There's work to be done, McQueen, and it's time you were getting the so-and-so back to do your share."

McQUEEN put the glasses on the straw-bronze spot which he still thought was a bear. A big bear.

He said, "I keep trying to tell you, chum. I'm not having any. No volunteering, no more. You suckered me on that, once before. I haven't forgotten the time you chased me three-quarters of the way over to the Mackenzie River country after those half-Indian, half-Jap iridium miners of yours."

"You didn't volunteer for that, pal. That was the only way you could think of to square yourself over the P-38 you washed out in that Honduran jungle."

"You mean the only way *you* could think of," McQueen muttered. "I was still jobbed. No more for me. Any time you want *me* again, you better have your friends down there get out one of those 'Greetings' letters. That's the only way I can be had, and maybe not then. I've found a lot of holes and corners in these woods, the past year or so, which make pretty good hiding."

McQueen swiveled his eyes around to his left to see what old man Jameson was making of that light patch over there. Old Red-eye was belly-down about seventy-five yards up the slope. McQueen saw him making violent signals with one hand and he put the glassees on it. The message, in bear-hunters' sign language, was plain enough but it made no sense. Jameson wasn't indicating the right spot at all.

On McQueen's other side, Joe Douglas was snorting, "You've been hidin' out too damned long, McQueen! One of these days you may have to find one of those holes of yours and climb in and pull it in after you!"

Watching Jameson, McQueen asked mildly, "Who you scairt of, Joe?"

"Who? You, you stupid knot-head! And everybody like you! Everybody who thinks the war's over and all he's got to do, for the rest of his life, is to sit on his can and remember what a hero he used to be."

Red-eye Jameson was a hard man to fool, in his own backyard. But this had also been McQueen's own bailiwick, for more than a year now, and his own eyesight was reasonably good. Good enough so that he knew a three-quarter-ton bear when he saw one. So . . . maybe there was more than one Brown down that slope. That being so, things might be about to start happening.

He told Douglas, "Look, Joe. You've got your job; I've got mine. It isn't much, at the moment, but I like it. Maybe it is your business to go around trying to hook peaceful and contented people into your lousy Intelligence racket. I don't even mind your trying to do it to me. How else could even you draw your *per diem* for a bear hunt all the way from the Pentagon to Bristol Bay without blushing, unless you got in a few licks along the way. O.K., so now you've tried. So let's drop it and hunt some bear."

"Look, yourself!" Douglas mocked him, sourly. "Your job! Hiding out in the woods like some kid playing Indian. I've

been trying to give you a job. Your own kind of a job, on your own terms. I told you we'd set up your airline for you. All we ask is that you run it."

"And I told you what kind of an airline. Four C-47's. With GCA equipment."

"All right. You can have 'em."

McQueen said, "Hey, how was that again?"

Watching Jameson, he saw that the old man was getting impatient. He was raising his body up out of the grass, his whiskers snapping in the wind and that whiskey nose of his twitching for all the world like a winding bird dog.

Still, he had to ask Douglas, "And what'll I do for money?"

"The R.F.C. will lend it to you."

"You can fix that?"

"We can fix it."

"Well, now. . ." The words were slow and hard coming, but there was no point in being foolish about it. Ex-bomber pilot McQueen had been sweating out a chance like this ever since V-J Day. The year of recuperation in the Kenai Mountain cabin which he had promised himself was about over. What else could he say, no matter what strings were tied to the offer?

"I shouldn't wonder but what you just sold a horse, Joe. I. . ."

Up the ridge, Jameson was hoisting his top half higher and higher, trying to see over that hump out front. That proved there were *two* bear. The one McQueen had spotted was short of the crest, not beyond it. If there were two, there might be more. And if they were going to have a choice, they might as well take it. They'd ought to send Joe Douglas back to Washington with the best possible trophy they could get him.

The thought chased airlines and visiting firemen who tendered them clean out of his mind. He felt excitement coming up in his throat, gripping him as tight as it was old Red-eye, up the hill. The old sourdough's idea seemed to be that they should stretch their necks out far enough to measure those pelts with their chin-whiskers. The old man was on his knees, now, his rifle gripped across the front of his body in straining eagerness. It was probably Red-eye's ninety-ninth bear hunt, but Alaska Browns were something a man never grew blasé about. McQueen hoped that the old so-and-so wouldn't get so excited that he'd start blasting. In ordinary hospitality, that first shot belonged to Douglas.

RED-EYE didn't shoot. Somebody else fired the shot. Even if McQueen had not been watching the old man, he would have known that. Because he heard the wicked *t-ssung-g!* of the bullet passing over his head quite a long instant before the flat crack of the rifle came to him.

Each of them, McQueen and Douglas, reacted according to his experience. General Joe, at his Pentagon desk, had never been shot at with anything more murderous than a rubber band. He said, "Hey, wh-what was that?"

McQueen, as a combat commander, and also a veteran of the Kenai Homesteaders' War the preceding fall, had a good deal richer background in such matters.

He said, simultaneously, "Hey, some s.o.b. is shootin' at us!" and squeezed himself at flat to the ground as his raw-boned two hundred pounds would let him. At the selfsame instant, he saw Jameson's half-crouching figure jerk upright, spin partway around, then flop back into the grass like a jointed doll.

McQueen breathed bitter words through his teeth and searched frantically along the line of alders to their right for the killer's location. He saw a faint breath of smoke drifting along the brush, just below and to the right of the little hump he had been watching.

He was concentrating so hard that he had no chance to see what Douglas was about to do. The staff man had also seen Jameson hit. His unschooled reaction to the sight was to leap to his feet and scramble frantically up the slope toward the old sourdough's body. And it cost him his life.

There were two shots this time, spaced a breath apart. Both hit Douglas, the second while he was falling in a long plunge forward. McQueen heard the *whoomp! whoomp!* with which they struck. He slammed three answering shots of his own into the alders, working his bolt in frantic hope that he might score by luck.

He didn't need to. At the instant the fusillade began, the hump across the valley erupted bears. There had been five, altogether, in the vicinity. Three, a sow and two yearling cubs, dove over the crest and

disappeared. The other two, huge hangovers from man's cave-dwelling days, thrashed down to the right through the alder thickets like a pair of runaway Sherman tanks. As the great animal in the lead hit the stream bed, McQueen saw him suddenly rear and reach out with log-sized forelegs. There was a flash of reddish cloth against straw-colored fur. A high, keening scream, bone-chilling in its agonized fear came knifing across the valley.

Up the slope, Red-eye said, "Well, there's one bushwhackin' son which won't never make the mistake o' scarin' bears uphill from him, ag'in."

Startled, McQueen twisted his head, and yelped, "Hey! You're dead!"

"Not yit. But I'm a mite worried about that brass-hat friend o' yourn."

McQueen jerked around to Douglas. The brigadier was lying in a crumpled heap, his face buried in the red-top. The

Suddenly the great animal reared and reached out with log-sized forelegs.

stillness of one outflung hand was mute witness that General Joe's flying days, at least with man-made wings, were over forever.

McQueen cursed with bitter, puzzled anger, and watched the alders. Four of the bears were gone. The fifth stopped mauling the bundle of reddish rags and he, too, moved on through the thickets. The sound of his passing died away. McQueen had had a chance at him, which he didn't choose to take.

In the first place, it looked like a situation where it might be well to husband ammunition. Mainly though, his mind was no longer on bear-hunting and if it had been, it would have seemed ungrateful to have destroyed the instrument of such sudden and cosmic justice.

Finally, he called to Jameson, "Think the coast's clear, Red-eye?"

The old man raised his head. "Reckon so. The feller must've been by himself."

McQueen pushed himself up and ran to Douglas, watching the thickets below with a wary eye. Jameson came down, a slight, spare figure with sixty years bowing his wiry shoulders and showing in wise old eyes.

They stood together, looking down. McQueen touched the still figure, gently, and felt for a pulse. There wasn't a flutter. The first slug had hit Douglas in the side, just below his belt, but the second had struck an inch above his right ear. McQueen straightened him out and laid his own jacket over the lifeless head and shoulders.

Grimly, he said, "I knew this was a sudden country, but there's sure as hell something more than funny about this. All right, Charley. You always know all the answers. What's it all about?"

Charley "Red-eye" Jameson had spent the last thirty of those sixty years in Alaska. Trapper, prospector, and general all-around woods-rat, he had, during the war, worked for Army Intelligence. McQueen suspected he still did. He was also, through some affinity neither of them had ever bothered to define, McQueen's best friend north of Seattle.

He said, now, "I dunno, Johnny. Not exactly, anyway. Mebbe when we look at what's left of our friend over yonder, we may be able to tell more about it. If there's anything left of him."

McQUEEN didn't move. He stayed there, staring down at Douglas' body in growing, uncomprehending rage. It had happened so fast, he was only beginning to feel the shock of it. Joe Douglas! The closest friend, in many ways, whom McQueen had ever had. And one of the most brilliant careers in the Air Forces. Cut down . . . blown away like a puff of smoke on the wind . . . in a hand's breadth of time, by a bullet from the brush.

Dully, McQueen asked, "What was the idea of that chicken-flopping act you put on up there? If it hadn't been for that, Douglas wouldn't have jumped up when he did."

The old eyes clouded. "I know, Johnny. I'm sorry enough to shoot myself over it. But how could I tell he would do a thing like that?"

"A man doesn't learn much about the facts of life in the Chairborne Cavalry. You still haven't told me why you did it."

"I expected that the feller was after me," Jameson explained. "I wanted him to think he'd got me."

"What made you think that he was after you?"

"That first shot clipped a half-inch o' fur off my left eyebrow. I dunno what better reason a man could have."

"No?" McQueen asked, glumly. "Well, I do. Come on, give."

Nobody had ever bull-dozed Charley Jameson. It didn't work now. He said, mildly, "What say we mosey over and see what our two-ton friend has left o' the character down in the bushes."

It wasn't much. McQueen took one look and gagged. He was no stranger to blood, but this was a little strong for his stomach. Old Red-eye, however, squatted and went through what pockets he could locate as calmly as a Skid Row girl rolling a drunk.

At length, he wiped his hands on a wisp of grass and stood up.

"Nothin' but the makin's and a box o' matches. No chee-chalker though, that's sure."

"Why?"

"Paraffin on the matches. Looks like he should have knew about bears uphill from him."

Stubbornly, McQueen went back to his original question. There was nothing in McQueen's craggy, long-jawed face that

spelled any lack of persistence whatsoever. "Why did you jump right away to the conclusion that the guy was after you? You messin' around with this Army gumshoe stuff again?"

The old man didn't answer directly. He tugged his whiskers, gazed at the sky in one or two directions, then asked, "I heard your friend, the general, back there—the ex-general—tryin' to sell you a piece of that, last night. What kind o' luck did he have?"

"None last night. A little better today. He offered me a whole damn airline, on the cuff."

Jameson nodded. "I figgered that'd get ye. I told 'em I thought you'd about had your bellyful o' Lake Tustumena."

"So you were the benny who put Douglas up to that?"

The old sourdough's eyes went round. "Now, Johnny. Do I look like the type to go around puttin' generals up to things? No, I only told General Douglas where to find you. And that you might be seduced into goin' along on a bear hunt."

"How'd you get in on it, in the first place? Come to think about it, I was curious about that. I forgot to ask you, before."

"Feller I work for said the general wanted to go on a bear hunt. Wanted to go along with a certain Johnny McQueen. Who was more logeekle for 'em to ask but me? Seein' as how I'm known to be one o' the few people who know where that Tustumena hide-out o' yourn is."

"Yeah," McQueen admitted, thinking it over. "That's logical, I guess. Joe made no bones about it that he had come up here hunting me as well as a bear. You still haven't answered my question."

"That's right, I haven't," Red-eye agreed equably. "S'pose we say that I'm sort o' lookin' around for some people, and I thought I might's well look over here. Seein's I ain't had any luck lookin' any place else."

"I see. Think you found one of them?"

Jameson looked down at the tattered heap of meat at his feet. "Might have. Might have, at that. Not exactly one o' the ones I was lookin' for, but pretty warm. Pretty warm."

"Then, speaking of warm—and knowing the kind of people you play around with—I suppose it would be healthier, if we were to dust our pants out of here. This guy may have friends."

"Johnny, I was just thinkin' that. I'm pretty sure he does. Even a low-lifed bushwhacker like him. I expect some tracks are just the thing for us to be makin', right about now."

He paused for one regretful look back at the thing on the ground. "It ain't that I'm not grateful to that bear—properly 'preciative o' what he did for us, an' all that. But I do wish he could've left some face on that feller."

"Think you might have known him?"

"Dunno. Might've. I've run into quite a smear o' shady characters, from time to time."

"You have that," McQueen agreed, bitterly. "And I'm usually along when you do. Next time, I'm going to stay home."

"You know what Deacon Brown told Sister Smith," Red-eye reminded him, starting up the hill. " 'You ain't home yit, sister!' We ain't done with this trip yet, son."

McQueen spun and stared back at the line of alders. "That's right," he grated. "That s.o.b. probably wasn't alone!"

"Oh, he was alone down *there,* all right. I reckon that herd o' bear would've flushed anybody still a-lyin' and a-lurkin'. But I agree with ye. He's probably got friends somewhere's near."

McQueen stopped again. "I'm for going to see."

"Where we goin' to look?" Jameson asked reasonably. "No, Johnny. I respect your feelings, but we better haul britches, just the same. Besides, there's. . ."

He pointed up the slope toward Douglas' body. McQueen nodded, reluctantly, and turned back. Up on the ridge, he wrapped the jacket tight around the dead man's head and heaved the limp body to his shoulder.

CHAPTER II

SILVER WINGS

THEY WERE a little over a mile above their base camp, at the mouth of the Alagnak, where it emptied into the head of Kvichak Bay, an arm of Bristol Bay. It was all downhill, but the footing was wet and treacherous in spots and it took

them the best part of an hour to make it.

It was that which killed the plan forming in McQueen's mind. He had intended, as soon as he could get to the twin-engined T-50 which Douglas had flown up from Washington and was now moored in the river below camp, to take a good, close look at the country beyond that valley, from the air. That bushwhacker had had to come from somewhere. The chances, in this country, were about nine to one that he would have come by air. Airplanes are hard to hide. McQueen meant to find the one this man had come in. Just what he would do after that, he had not decided.

He didn't have to. It took them too long to carry Douglas down. They were little more than halfway when an engine drummed from over the intervening ridges behind them and a little silver ship came into view, flying low along the margin of the bay to their left.

"Get the glasses on him, quick!" McQueen rapped at Jameson. "Spot that license number!"

Red-eye already had the glasses to his eyes. He muttered to himself, said, "It ain't on the tail, Johnny. An' I can't see the wings."

McQueen slid Douglas' body to the ground and whipped up his own binoculars. The 8-power glasses yanked the little plane in close, but not close enough. The *NC* on the rudder surface showed plainly but there was a white rag or the wipe of a paint brush across the number which should have been below. And the airplane was flying just low enough that the wings were level with McQueen. It was impossible for him to see a number on either surface, even if they weren't also masked.

He swore, "The bastard's got his number blanked! Anyway, that proves he's the rat we want!"

"Shore," Red-eye agreed, dryly. "All we got to do is ketch 'im."

"I'll catch him,' McQueen promised grimly, studying the rapidly disappearing plane. "That's a Globe Swift he's flying. There aren't too many of those up here. Just give me time. I'll find out who was flying that one, this afternoon."

The silver plane dwindled to a dot in the northeast. McQueen lowered the glasses. "He's heading for the pass, all right. We'll go by Iliamna and Ninilchick on the way back and see if he went in either place.

Red-eye Jameson

If he didn't, he'll have to be down at Spenard, in Anchorage."

Jameson said, noncommittally, "We'll hope so, Johnny," and came over to help lift Douglas to McQueen's shoulder again. At camp, fifteen minutes later, McQueen pulled on waders and carried the body out to the Cessna. He strapped it securely to a rear seat and went back for the first load of duffel which Red-eye had made ready.

The old sourdough worked rapidly and they were traveling light. He came out through the hip-deep water with the last load as McQueen was warming the engines. McQueen swung the trim little plane downstream and took off into the incoming tide.

They were airborne on the second bounce and McQueen turned wide to his right, reaching for altitude. As they climbed, the broad sheet of Lake Iliamna came into sight ahead. McQueen put the left-hand, northern shore under his left wing-tip and followed the margin to the anchorage at Iliamna. No silver plane

showed there, nor at the mooring in the lake.

McQueen muttered and fiddled with the radio until the Army beam at Naknek came into his headphones. Beside him, old Red-eye worked his jaw and ruminated. Finally he spoke.

"That there plane, Johnny. Float ship, wasn't she?"

"Of course it had floats. What would you expect in September, stilts?"

"I would expect floats. What I wouldn't expect is to see it at Iliamna, n'r Ninilchik neither."

McQueen looked over. "You wouldn't, eh? Where would you expect to see it?"

"Might be settin' there in Lake Spenard, when we git in. Or, ag'in, it might not. Prob'ly not."

"Oh? Probably not at Spenard. Then, where?"

Jameson shook his head. "I wish I knew, Johnny."

McQueen turned back to flying and thinking about that. He asked, "That what you're out looking for, is it? The place where that plane might have come down?"

"Could be. It could be."

"Well, then, let's do a little scouting around. We can gas at Ninilchik and we've got a couple hours of daylight to spare."

JAMESON pointed down at the jumble over which they were flying. Jagged peaks reared up from the massive ramparts, separated by myriad silver-threaded canyons. The silver threads widened in a hundred places within one glance into glacial mountain lakes. Not far to their right, Mount Katmai wore its plume of vapor. Beyond Katmai, a low, eternal pall overhung the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes.

McQueen said, "I see what you mean. Not much of a country to hunt one airplane in, unless you got some idea where to hunt. And you don't have?"

"Not much. A little better than I did, before. . . " Jameson glanced back at the still figure strapped to the seat behind McQueen and stopped.

"What's it all about, Red-eye? Remember, I was about to join your team, just before Douglas got it."

It shocked McQueen to hear himself say that, just that way. It was a throwback to a frame of mind, as well as a manner of speech, which he had never expected to find himself in again. Where blood, battle and sudden death were all part of the day's work.

He didn't like it. But with Joe Douglas' lifeless body riding the seat behind him, he didn't know what he was going to do about not liking it. He understood that he was going to have to do something. And he might as well be getting at it.

So he asked again, "All right, Charley. Give. What's it all about?"

Charley meditated. "You said you was *about* to join the team. Well . . . did ye?"

McQueen sighed. "I did."

"But it was General Douglas that offered to set ye up in business." The old man hitched a thumb toward the rear seat. "And General Douglas's dead."

"That's right. He's dead. And he and I were kids together, in flying school. To hell with the airline."

Jameson, without looking, reached over and touched McQueen's knee. "I know, Johnny. Don't think I led the General into a deadfall. He wanted to come."

"Wanted to come bear-hunting? I sort of supposed he did. To fly all the way from Washington."

"I didn't mean that, exackly. He wanted to hunt around Iliamna."

"Oh? Why?"

"Same reason I did."

McQueen snorted. "Are you going to tell me why you did. Or do we play questions-and-answers all the way back to Anchorage?"

"I was looking for some fellers. The general was, too."

"Who?"

Jameson shook his head. "I don't know. Oh, I know what they look like. Might even know their names, if'n I had to come right out with them. They come up here on some sort o' expedition, 'way last summer. They don't seem to 've been heard of since. The Army seems to think they might have got themselves lost."

McQueen said, quietly, "I see. And the Army is worrying about it?"

"Somewhat. A leetle more than somewhat, I might say."

"And they might have been down around Iliamna, just before they got lost? Was that the real reason Joe Douglas came up here?"

Jameson nodded. "The main one, I shouldn't wonder."

"I don't suppose there's any use my asking what kind of an expedition this was—this one these men were on?"

The old man shook his head, regretfully. "I'll tell ye, Johnny. If it's your real intention to go back to work for the Army, I expect I better turn ye over to the boss. He can give out with whatever dope he thinks ye should have. Me, I prob'ly don't even know enough to start ye out."

"Who's your boss?"

"Feller out at Fort Richardson, name of Frayne. Colonel Frayne. Pretty smart wolf, too, he seems to be."

"I've heard of him," McQueen admitted. "He's the Base Area G-2, or so I understood. So it's G-2 business, is it? Well, I guessed that. Douglas was in Central Intelligence down south. But what's the sudden excitement? I suppose it's still our Red friends, but what are they up to, now?"

Cook Inlet glinted in the afternoon sun, ahead and to their right. Red-eye peered down at it, his jaw working meditatively. He said, "Ye been holed up there in that shack of yours at Tustumena a right smart while, haven't ye, Johnny?"

"You should know. You helped me move in, just about two years ago."

"Yeah, I remember. Well, seems like quite a lot's been happening, in the past year."

"What?"

"Some queer characters, Johnny. A whole lot of them. I don't know who they are, or where they come from. It ain't my business to know, an' I'm thankful for that. My work is all out in the brush. Where it's a doggone sight less complicated."

McQueen banked the Cessna in a long, slow turn to their left, following the south shore of Cook Inlet, heading east for Anchorage. They were passing the air anchorage at Ninilchuk at five miles and three thousand feet, but he didn't bother to go in for his look. If what Jameson said were true, looking for the silver plane was a waste of time.

At length he said, "From all you say, I gather we're being moved in on. I believe it. That is, I believe it could happen. What I don't see is why we aren't doing something about it."

"I dunno, Johnny. Like I said, that stuff's all out of my line. You ask Frayne about it. Speakin' o' Frayne, I been thinkin' about the general back there. I don't think we want to unload him at Spenard, right in front of God an' everybody, Johnny."

"I begin to see where it wouldn't be wise," McQueen agreed. "You any suggestions?"

"No, I don't reckon it would. My idee is that you set this thing down there, let me out, an' then go on up the Inlet some place. Some place not too far, so's I c'n get the word to Frayne to send out to meet you."

McQueen thought it over. "There's still the matter of CAA clearances to worry about. And the radar at Elmendorf Field. That is, if we're interested in covering tracks, and I take it we are. I'll tell you: I'll take in and put you off, then go up to Eklutna. There's a good road up there and Frayne could have his people meet me in an hour or two. I say Eklutna because those mountains around the lake will mask the radar."

"That sounds skookum to me," Jameson agreed. "But it'll be more than an hour. I'll have to get hold of Frayne, in person, an' that sometimes takes awhile. He prob'ly won't want to come up before dark, anyway."

McQueen gave him a sour grin. "You people are really playing 'I Spy,' aren't you? Well, for goodness' sake, tell this Frayne that I'm on the right side. And that I didn't shoot Douglas. They've got some lovely spots for a lynching, up around Eklutna."

They crossed over Cook Inlet at two thousand, then skirted the east shore, flying north, until the muddy flood of Turnagain Arm showed under their right wing. McQueen let down then, cutting into traffic over Lake Spenard, the summer center of civilian air activity outside the Territory's northern metropolis of Anchorage.

There were a dozen or so small planes on the mile-wide lake. McQueen, avoiding those moving on the water, taxied up to a desertd finger pier and let Jameson off. An M.P. detail in a jeep, spotting the Army markings on the T-50, came along the beach road, raising a cloud of white dust. McQueen gunned his engines and pulled away before they reached the pier.

CHAPTER III

TOP SECRET

LAKE EKLUTNA was a sheet of blue, glacier-fed water in a volcanic cup in the Chugaches, twenty-five miles east. McQueen climbed over the barrier rim and let the small ship settle into it, aiming for a spot along the north shoreline, not too far from the road by which the Army man, Frayne, would have to come.

He taxied in to wading depth behind the screen of a little, pine-clad point, pulled up his rubber waders and carried a mooring line ashore. Then he wrestled General Joe's stiffening body out of the rear seat and carried it ashore. He laid it on a hummock above the beach, pulled the legs down straight, and covered it again. He sat down beside it and rolled a thoughtful smoke.

He had made the fourth or fifth successor to the butt and dusk was fading out the saffron glow on the high snowcaps around him when Frayne came. Down below, in the timber, it was all but dark and the tarp-covered pick-up came nosing along the beach track behind dimmed headlights.

The truck stopped a quarter mile short of McQueen and a long-reaching flashlight beam flicked on and off, searching the shore-line. The light touched the moored airplane briefly and the truck came on. McQueen rose, stretched, and moved out into the track.

There were two men in the pick-up. The lanky, square-jawed one who stepped down wore colonel's eagles. The non-com with him was a broad, blocky shadow in the cab interior. McQueen peered through the gloom at Frayne as the tall man came through the dimmed lights but he couldn't see much more than his height.

He said, "I'm McQueen, Colonel. Jameson told you what I've got?"

The Intelligence Officer put out his hand. "Frayne," he said. "I've heard of you. Yes, Charley told me. Where is he?"

McQueen pointed. Frayne called, "Goodman!" and the big sergeant came out. McQueen led them to Douglas.

Frayne asked, "How long?" The colonel didn't seem to be a man over-fond of wasting words.

"Good six hours," McQueen told him.

"Killed outright, was he?"

"In the head."

Frayne nodded. He made a gesture to Sergeant Goodman. Goodman hoisted Douglas' body to one shoulder with no visible effort whatever, and plodded off toward the pickup.

Frayne offered a crumpled cigarette pack to McQueen, fished one out for himself. He put it in his mouth, then took off his cap and stood, rubbing his head with one big hand. He forgot to light the cigarette.

At length, he said. "I don't suppose you can add anything to what Jameson's told me?"

McQueen grunted. "I doubt it. He seemed to know a hell of a lot more than I've even been able to guess."

"He told me that the general had had a chance to proposition you, before this happened. That right?"

"That's right."

"How did he make out?"

"All right. I used to be with Douglas, and—"

Frayne put up a hand, stopping him. He said, "Never mind. I know all about you. General Douglas told me he was going down there just to get you."

"Yes. But Douglas is dead. I'm not held by anything I promised him."

The tall colonel's eyes, even in the gloom, went suddenly bleak. He said, "This thing startled you a bit, eh?"

"If you mean has it scared me, certainly it has. To this extent, at least. If I'm going to have people gunning for me from the brush, I want to know who is doing the gunning, and why."

"That's a good deal. I'd like to know that much, myself."

There was a short silence. McQueen said, "I didn't mean to get off on the wrong foot with you, Colonel. But I think I've got a briefing coming."

"Briefing for what?"

"For whatever it is that you want me to do."

"I heard you say you didn't mean to be held by anything you told Douglas."

"Yes, I said that. I know what Douglas wanted of me. He had an idea about a cargo airline, making all the outlying settlements, and operated by people A-2 could trust. I figure you want something different."

FRAYNE said evenly, making no commitment by tone or manner, "We're all working to the same end, McQueen."

"Not all of us. Mine's now a little more personal."

"You said that once. They took a shot at you, personally, did they?"

"They did. There's that, too. But Joe Douglas was a friend of mine. I figure to look up the people responsible for that. Whatever I can do for you, on the side, I'm ready to hear about."

The Army man said slowly, "You'll get your orders, McQueen. But—"

McQueen broke in, shortly. "Orders, Colonel? I'm not in the Army."

"It hapens you are. Maybe Douglas didn't tell you. But he requested your return to active duty. We got a confirmation this morning."

"The hell you did! Why, damn . . . what grade?"

Frayne chuckled, for the first time. "Same as the one you had when you went out. Rank and pay of Colonel, AAF, assigned to A-2. No flying pay."

McQueen grinned. "No flight pay! Well, damn their penny-pinching souls! Yes, I guess Joe was pretty sure of me. Now that I think of it, he had a right to be. All right, Colonel, if that's the way it is. What're the orders?"

"No matter what they are, you'll still find time to look for the people who killed Douglas, I suppose?"

"I expect to give the matter some attention."

Frayne finally took time to light the cigarette in his mouth. Then he said, "Yes, I suppose you will. I don't blame you. And it's all part of the same puzzle, anyway."

McQueen waited. The tip of the other's cigarette glowed deeply through the dark, two or three times. At length, Frayne said, "I have heard a good deal about you, McQueen. Some good—some bad."

"Both could be exaggerated."

"Yes. Probably is. The bad part really sounds the most useful, from my point of view. They tell me you're inclined to be a bit of an outlaw."

"Wel-l, could be," McQueen admitted. "There was that New Year's Eve in Washington, back in '38, and—"

Frayne laughed. "Wasn't that F Street drunk tank a hell of a place, though? No, but they tell me some horrendous tales about that Homesteaders' War—they've come to call it that around here—which you organized down the Kenai, last year. And that you have manhandled several of the local badmen, from time to time, without benefit of assistance from the forces of law and order. All in all, a typical sourdough type. That is what interests me, frankly."

"That part," McQueen assured him, "is really exaggerated."

"Not the way I heard it. Maybe I'm just thinking wishfully, because that is exactly what I need—what I've got to have. Somebody who can get under these sourdoughs' hides and find out some things. One thing, in particular."

"Such as?"

"Such as where to find a man named Cornelius Rehm. Or at least to find out what happened to him?"

"Cornelius Rehm?" McQueen repeated. "I've heard of him. But not in Alaska. You can't mean that hotshot physicist, can you? That bird from M.I.T. who worked on the A-bomb?"

"That's the precise individual."

"But—what in hell?"

"What in hell was he doing up here? What is it that has shortened my life by ten years?" The G-2 man stopped, turned to cast a rueful glance back to the truck in which Douglas' body was laid, said, "After what I let happen to General Douglas, on top of it, I probably haven't *official* life enough left to bother about. Nevertheless, something's got to be done about this Rehm thing, and quick! Here's the story. The short version."

HE STEPPED closer to McQueen and dropped his voice, unconsciously. His lowered tones were strained and savage. "During the early part of the war, an old duffer wandered into Anchorage, from somewhere down in the Iliamna country with a crazy story about a mountain of—he called it—pitchblende he had found. He only talked about it when he was drunk, to other drunks, and nobody used to pay any attention to sourdough yarns like that, anyway. But, after Hiroshima, somebody remembered him. I wasn't here at the time, but the file shows that it—

the process of hunting for him—was more or less routine, at first. Then Washington got hold of it, and it became anything but routine."

"Pitchblende, eh?" McQueen repeated. "That's radium and uranium mixed, as I remember the schoolbooks."

"Plus some thorium, I think. I wouldn't know. But—you see?"

"I see," McQueen agreed. "What about old Jameson? He knows everybody that ever walked, flew or crawled into the Territory."

"We know *who* the man was. What they didn't know, at the time, was *where* he was. What had happened to him."

"Well? Did you ever find out?"

"We found out. Somewhere, he had gotten hold of some money. And he straightway did what every old sourdough does, with variations. He went Outside and married some wench about old enough to be his granddaughter—that is, she could have been if he had gotten an early start. Then he came back, bought a little island down in the Alexanders, and settled down to fox farm. That's where we found him. Dead."

"Dead? How, dead?"

"About three weeks, as I understand."

McQueen considered. "What about the child bride? Hadn't he told her anything?"

"That's a question."

"Didn't catch up with her, either, eh? How about the windfall? Where had he gotten this money?"

"That's another question."

"I see. Lots of questions and no answers." McQueen did a little mental reconstructing. "You found the old goat in a ripe condition, all by himself on one of those little coastal islands. No communication except by water. No trace of the wife. So it's presumed she left the place along with whoever did him in."

"That's about the picture."

"Yes. Well, it could be simple enough. Maybe the old man had some of the dough cached away in cash and the bride had boy friends."

"I haven't told you," Frayne reminded him grimly, "how the old man was killed."

"How was he killed?"

"With a blowtorch?"

"With a— Good God!"

"Exactly."

McQueen swallowed. His reconstruction of that scene wasn't pretty. "Somebody else wanted to know about the uranium mountain, eh? Do you know whether they found out?"

"Not absolutely. The medics' opinion was that the old fellow died of heart failure. That is, his old clock just stopped, under shock and abuse. The fact that they had to burn him at all would seem to prove that he was being stubborn. Then the supposition could be that he passed out under treatment, in a manner of speaking."

"But you don't know."

"We don't know."

"And you never got a line on the girl?"

Frayne didn't answer. His silence was assent enough, in a disgusted sort of way. McQueen asked, "I don't quite see where it leads us to this Rehm character, however."

"I don't, either. I wish to God I did. But, hell, I don't mean to be making riddles for you, McQueen. We've got enough trouble without that. What I mean is that Rehm came up here to hunt for the same uranium deposit—pitchblende mountain—and we've lost *him,* too!"

"*Lost* him! Killed?"

Frayne shook his head. "No. Just lost."

McQueen drew a deep breath. "If they sent Cornelius Rehm, somebody must have believed the old man's story. He's a pretty big wheel to be rolled out to chase down fairy tales."

Frayne grunted. "Ever hear of a place called Shingkobwe?"

"Lord, no. I know about Skwentnatsuk, but nothing worse."

"It isn't around here. It's in the Belgian Congo. It's the only really sizable uranium deposit yet discovered. And we ain't got it. In the present state of poltical affairs, we're not apt to get it. So you see that even a prospector's yarns of other deposits which we *can* get our hands on are not to be taken lightly."

"I suppose not."

"Besides, there was more to it. Rehm, I understand, was one of these sweetness and light guys. He believes in the brotherhood of man—thinks that we should all be one big, happy family. I think they talked him into this trip just to get him out of the way for awhile. He knew all the top secrets and was hell-bent on giving 'em away. I suppose they've changed the combination

on the safe while he's been gone, or something like that. However, that doesn't mean that they don't want him back. And it's up to me—to us—to get him back."

"Where's he gone?"

"Somewhere down in that Iliamna country you just came from. At least, that's where he was last seen."

"Who saw him?"

"Well, it was like this. He arrived here, at Fort Richardson, armed with the damndest orders and authority you ever saw. He was to get anything he wanted, when he wanted it, and just the way he wanted it. He planned his own party, in other words. Being the type he was, he was suspicious as all hell of anyone in uniform. We wanted to send along some of the Scouts as a camp detail—guard detail—he sneered and asked 'Bodyguard or prison guard?' and refused to have anything to do with them."

"Sounds like a nice, appreciative guy."

"Yes. Well, we put his party ashore where he wanted—at Naknek, just south of where you were today—and left them. They headed up into the hills. Ten days later, all of them came out but three—Rehm and two assistants he had brought with him from the States. They said—your friend Jameson had been put in the way of Rehm's taking him along as a guide—that they had built a base camp at a place on Iliuk Arm, below Katmai, then had been told thanks and good-bye. Rehm didn't need them any longer."

"Now, that," McQueen said, puzzled, "doesn't sound like Red-eye. I would have expected that inquisitive old goat to have hung around until hell froze, if it was his job."

"I know. And Jameson had his orders. He'll tell you what happened. Anyway, Rehm and his two men disappeared. They still are. We've never found a trace. Jameson will explain how "they got away from him."

"When was all this?"

"Jameson reported them missing about the middle of June."

McQUEEN whistled. "You said he wasn't dead, just lost. If it's been that long, what makes you think he's still alive? Greenhorns like those three must be lost in *that* country."

"We have heard from him. Radio messages come in, every so often. Usually just after we've had a new air search out looking for him. The message is always to the effect that he is perfectly all right, minding his own business, and why don't we do the same. He told us, once, that when he wanted to come out, he'd let us know where to pick him up."

"Self-reliant soul."

Frayne grunted. "I wish I thought so. I wish I could even be sure that he was sending those messages himself."

"Didn't he have a radio?"

"Oh, certainly. They are coming from his own set. But—well, let Jameson tell you about it."

"I suppose, then," McQueen said slowly, "that the thing you want of me is to go over there with Jameson and run this character down. Is that it?"

"That's it."

"With airplanes, with pilots, and use of your Scouts? I can call on you for anything I need?"

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"You cannot call on me for one damned thing," the Intelligence man told him bluntly. "Don't you think we—the Army—has been out looking? We've flown something like thirty-five missions over there. One platoon of the Scouts has a permanent base at Iliamna. And we've accomplished exactly nothing. You've got to do it on your own."

"That's quite an order, Colonel," McQueen allowed, dryly. "The Army gives up and turns it over to me. Complimentary, but—"

"Complimentary, hell!" Frayne snapped. "It's desperation. Actually, the thing I hope you can do, which we haven't been able to, is to pry some information out of some of these local people. I know that some of the prospectors and general utility woods-rats who hang out in that neighborhood know things we don't. But do you think they'll tell us?"

"That's right," McQueen agreed thoughtfully. "I was about to ask you. I'm sure some of the natives would know about such a thing. And they won't tell you?"

"You're supposed to understand the genus sourdough, McQueen. The last word in rugged individualists. The guys who don't want to be bothered by anybody, any time, for any reason. Particularly, not by anybody who has anything to do with the government. Well, that attitude has been growing lately. Growing by leaps and bounds. Somebody is around reminding them of it."

"Good God! Don't tell me we are being infiltrated, already!"

'I'm afraid we are. In more ways than one. You've been out in the woods too long, McQueen. You may have to catch up with things in a hurry."

"But who's doing it? The comrades?"

"Who else would be interested?"

McQueen shook his head. "Now that you ask, I guess I wouldn't know who else. But— My God! Can you prove it?"

"I'm not in the prosecuting business. As a matter of fact, there is one Russian agent we're sure of. With their well-known opinion of our intelligence, both native and military, they've sent one back who was here during the war, and with whom several of us were once quite well acquainted. We're watching that particular egg to see what it hatches."

"Should I be able to identify the gentleman when I see him?"

Frayne chuckled, without much mirth. "Identification will be the least of your problems, when you meet up with this one. It doesn't happen to be a gentleman, not even what passes for one amongst the comrades. It's a she, and she works in a joint out by the Lake, run by a man whom I understand to be an old acquaintance of yours."

"Don't tell me his name is Mixon!"

The I.O. nodded. "That's the fellow. She operates his check-room. We have no reason to suspect that he knows what she is, but we'd be interested in anything you might pick up. In the way of information, that is. By the way, in emergencies, you can call me through the '2' office, on the Post. In public, we had better assume we haven't met. If it should become absolutely necessary for us to get together again, tell Jameson. He has a place where we meet, when we have to."

The tall man put out his hand. "I'd better be getting back. Good luck, McQueen."

"Thanks, I'll likely need it. What about this airplane of Douglas'?"

"Set it down at Spenard. I'll have somebody alerted to take it over. You won't be going in tonight, will you?"

It was full dark, now. Even the early moonlight did not reach down into the black cup of the lake. McQueen said, "No, not until morning. I've got a bed-sack in the plane."

He walked to the truck with Frayne. One foot on the step, the tall man turned for one last word. "One thing I'd better tell you. That girl at Mixon's—she goes by the name of Gorman—real name's Katsa Gourin—she's the one who was married to the old man down in the Alexanders, the one who was worked over with the blowtorch. Might be a good thing to keep in mind."

CHAPTER IV

BEAR HUNT

McQUEEN crawled from his bed-sack when the first faint morning light touched the snow-caps ringing the lake. Even so, the Spenard anchorage was busy with

morning traffic by the time he let the T-50 down into the traffic pattern. Three planes, taking off, rocked him with their bow waves as he taxied across to the Army finger piers. But he didn't see any Swifts among them, or around the moorings.

An AAF crew chief came out on the pier to meet him, and take the ship. McQueen made out the flight log while the chief's men were helping unload duffel. He borrowed a jeep and driver from the chief to take it and himself into town. While he was loading the jeep, another figure came down the pier.

Wool-shirted and wispy-whiskered, he could have passed for Red-eye Jameson's brother. McQueen knew him almost as well. Old Jake Johnson had been a neighfor of his, as such distances go in Alaska, on the other side of the Pass from Tustumena. On McQueen's infrequent trips up and down the railroad, he had usually shacked overnight with Jake at Moose Pass.

"Hi, Jake," McQueen hailed him. "What're you doing up here t' the city? Thought you'd be denned up for the winter, by now."

Jake parted his whiskers and squirted a brown stream into the blue lake water. "Hello, Johnny," he answered, sadly. "I'm jest about to do that very doggone thing. I'm tryin' t' git back t' to Pass, right now."

"Oh? Flying down?"

"If'n you'll take me."

"I'd be glad to, Jake. But I'm not going anywhere."

"Well?" Jake was surprised. An old-timer, he was used to men going five hundred miles and two months out of their way just to deliver a message. McQueen knew that Jake would have done that; probably had, many times.

"Well, ye could, couldn't ye?"

"Sure I could, Jake. Except I don't have an airplane."

Jake glanced at the T-50. "What might that yere contraption be?"

"That one belongs to Uncle Sugar. The U.S. government."

"You was flyin' it, wasn't ye?"

"I just had to give it back."

Old Jake spat again. "Yeah, the goddam gov'mint. They got their nose into ev'thing. If'n it wasn't for the gov'mint, I wouldn't have to be around beggin' rides off'n my friends."

"Have a bad summer, Jake?" McQueen asked, sympathetically.

"Didn't have no summer, a-tall. I had a good trip all mapped out, 'n then the dad-blanked Army wouldn't let me go there. So I went up t' the Dutch Hills instead. No place else I could git to, at the last minute. I didn't make expenses."

"Where did you want to go?"

"Over crost the Inlet into that Iliamna country. But no. Not open to prospecting, the gov'mint says. Off limits, the Army says. Dad-blanked, mother-hatin' sons o' so and so's. It's jest like a feller says to me, las' night. They ain't runnin' the country f'r the little fellers, no more. Jest f'r them N' Yawk bankers that think they own it all."

McQueen had finished his loading. He said, "Jump in, Jake. I'll take you back to town, anyway. So the man told you that, did he? By the way, who grub-staked you this summer?"

"Well-l, the Northern did."

"And last summer, too, didn't they? And a lot of summers before that. The Northern Mining and Development Company. New York bankers, eh? Nuts!"

"Mebbe so, they are," Jake argued defensively. "But they been in the Territ'ry f'r forty years. An' they make you sign your life away, when they do unloosen with a nickel."

The jeep driver rolled off the end of the pier and twisted onto the blacktop paralleling the shoreline in a shower of loose, egg-sized rock off the shoulder. Past the last of the hangars, McQueen saw a new log-and-stucco building crowning a little point jutting into the water.

"Make you sign your life away, do they?' he repeated absently. "Jake, what's that new dump, over there?"

"They shore do. That's Morse Mixon's new saloon. They make you agree t' split anything y' find, don't they?"

"And what did they pay you for that strike you made up on the Kuskokwim before the war? Something like a hundred thousand bucks, wasn't it? And who had to put in the machinery and build the camp? And how much have they ever taken out of it?"

"Well, shore. They made a mistake. That's what they're in business for."

"And what did you do with the money they gave you? Dropped it all in that swin-

dle where the guy was supposed to be going to raise Karakul sheep in the Aleutians, didn't you? Damned good thing if the Army had told you to keep out then, wouldn't it? How long ago did Mixon build that?"

OLD JAKE was hurt. "What ye mad about, Johnny? Ye ain't in the Army no more. What do we care if a man bitches a mite? I don't know when Morse built 'er. Sometime las' summer, seems to me I heard. He jist fixed over an old shack that was already there."

"No, I don't care," McQueen told the old man. "I'm only trying to get onto things again, after a year in the brush. What I'm really interested in is—did I hear you say Iliamna? You know that country, Jake?"

"I b'n in it."

"Good. Maybe you and I could whip over there on a little shootin' trip, one of these days."

"When would you want to go, Johnny? I got t' git down to the Pass an' see about some winter meat. An' what about the Army?"

"Maybe they wouldn't object to a hunting trip. I'll stand all the expense, Jake, if you'll guarantee to put me on a good Brown."

"Can do that, all right. There's plenty o' bear over there."

"Yes," McQueen agreed, thinking of the previous afternoon. "I've heard there are."

The jeep was entering Anchorage's southern outskirts. They reached out farther into the country than he remembered. Also, the skyline was different.

He said, "Good thing I didn't have to sit down here in a snowstorm. I'd have thought I'd missed and hit Chicago. Where the hell did all the skyscrapers come from?"

Jake spat over the side in disgust. "Ye sh'd go on downtown an' look. The damn things 're jumpin' up all over. Four stories, five stories, six stories—makes a man feel like going' up to live with the Eskimos."

Red-eye Jameson's cabin was on the near side of town, toward a pocket in the Inlet's shoreline called Bootlegger's Cove. McQueen directed the jeep driver until they were at the top of the bluff, within about a block of it, then asked to get out.

He said, "I guess the driver'll take you on into town, Jake. You go on down to the Pass. If I can get away to make that bear trip, I'll come down and pick you up."

The driver, a curly-headed boy in his teens, obviously new to both the uniform and the Territory, said, "Sure, I'll run him into town. But how about gettin' in on this bear hunt? I could get a pass easy. I'd pay you to take me."

Old Jake spat again, with a highly expressive sound. McQueen said hastily, "Son, we'd like to, but we haven't got a big enough outfit for more than two people. Spring is a lot better time to go, anyway."

Reluctantly, the boy wheeled the jeep back into the road and headed back toward Anchorage. McQueen shouldered the two rifles and the packs, caching the rest of the duffel behind a bush for another trip, and walked down the hill to Jameson's tarpaper shack hanging to the side of the slope, overlooking the cove.

Red-eye was at home, washing up from breakfast. He said calmly, "Hi, Johnny, Jest in time to wipe the dishes."

"Wipe the dishes, hell! Just in time for you to set another plate and start cooking. I could eat that bear we saw yesterday."

When he finished bringing the rest of their baggage down the hill, Jameson had the coffee boiling again and a pan on the stove. He poured two cups and sat down to drink one with McQueen while he ate.

McQueen asked, through his second mouthful, "Well? What's new in town? Besides a litter of new buildings?"

"Place is shore changing, ain't it?"

"Yeah. I gave Jake Johnson a ride in with me. He says he's going to move to Point Barrow."

"Lots o' people movin'. All directions. Jest to be movin', most of 'em. Aasie Gowen's in town."

"I knew she was."

"I figgered you did."

"Never mind my love life, you lascivious old goat. I asked you, what do you know that you didn't, last night?"

Red-eye was unperturbed. "What do you?"

"Not much. I talked to Colonel Frayne, up at the lake. Rather, he talked to me. How come you to lose those people? You getting careless in your old age?"

"Guess so, Johnny. I left 'em parked where they wanted to be left. When I come back to see how they was doin', they just wasn't there no more."

"Where did they go?"

"That," Red-eye said, "is the jackpot question. Didn't the colonel tell ye?"

"He told me. He couldn't tell me how you come to lose 'em. I thought you were supposed to be able to track a bull mosquito through a swamp."

Red-eye was annoyed. "Listen, ye brash young squirt! Frayne tell ye what this Rehm feller did? Well, when he run me out from the camp on Iliuk, I only went as far as the Scout base at the foot of the lake. One o' the Scouts and I took a canoe and slipped right back up to watch. We got there before morning of the second day. And all three of 'em was gone."

"I heard that. The point is, where did they go?"

"They didn't go inland. An' I don't think any of 'em could walk on water. Even though this Rehm acted like he thought he could."

McQueen lowered his coffee cup. "Oh ho! So they were picked up by air, were they?"

"Less'n they up an' sprouted wings, they were," Jameson told him, sourly.

McQUEEN put the cup back in the saucer and rotated it thoughtfully. He watched the liquid swirling in the cup for a moment or two.

"Any idea where they might have gone?"

Jameson shook his head. "The Scout feller—S'arn't Littledog—an' I looked around some, but that's almighty tough country. An' how you goin' to keep up with an airyplane? And, then, the question comes up; did they go, or was they took?"

"What do you think? Any signs?"

"There wasn't any fight, if that's what you mean. But they left food cookin'."

McQueen said, "Charley, this doesn't look good. It doesn't look good, at all. I'm just guessing, but . . . it doesn't look good."

Jameson grunted. "I reckon it don't. Frayne is shore excited. But if you can make any medicine over what I've told ye, ye're a hell of a lot smarter than this old man."

"I'm afraid it adds up. Why was this Rehm so hell-bent on keeping only two men with him? The two men he had brought all the way from the States? Was that smart?"

"It shore wasn't. This Rehm feller didn't impress me as bein' much ahead of a dumb Aleut, in any respeck."

"Don't fool yourself. In his own way, he's one of the dozen or two smartest there is. The other thing is, we can be reasonably sure that he didn't leave Iliuk of his own free will. He was—well, persuaded."

"Kidnapped, ye mean? But who in hell . . . ?"

"That comes last. Tell me one thing. When you made the trip up in the J boat and settled him at Iliuk, you had to pack in a good deal of equipment, didn't you?"

Jameson sighed. "Johnny, ye never saw so much junk! Rehm even had hisself a canvas an' rubber horse-trough he says is a c'lapsible bathtub."

"Didn't he have something he wouldn't let anybody else touch?"

Jameson thought a second. Then, "He shore did, now that you mention it, Johnny. Some damn thing, 'bout a foot square in a kind of shiny rubber case that he even slept on. Had it hung over his shoulder all day, an' used it for a pillow at night."

McQueen sat back. "I'm afraid that's it, Charley. I'm afraid that's what we've got to find, even more than Rehm. Do you happen to know what Rehm was looking for? What the whole expedition was about?"

"Shore, I heard. They was lookin' for that pitchblende mountain that ol' Skagway Sorenson claimed he found, before the war."

"Yes. And that stuff's radio-active, you know."

"That's what the 'Prospector's Guide' says," Jameson agreed.

"So—I'm afraid Rehm was lugging along some kind of a Geiger counter, they call it. It registers radio-activity."

"I've read in the papers about them things. I didn't know they was scarce. You mean somebody'd go to all that trouble to steal one? What're they worth?"

"Depends on how bad you want one. And I think some of our friends may want one pretty bad."

"Them fur-bearin' bastards over 'cross, ye mean?" Jameson rolled his eyes in the general direction of Siberia. McQueen

nodded. The old man slid down in his chair and tugged at his whiskers.

Finally, he said, "That brings somethin' to mind, Johnny. If it was Rooshians, it'd have t'be some that slipped acrost on us, wouldn't it?"

McQueen nodded. "It's a big country, Charley. And we're practically within spitting distance of them."

"Shore is. An' you know, too, Johnny, the's allus been more of them around than ye could round up in a year. We ain't had the Territ'ry from them so long."

"We got it about the time you were born, I think. Eighty years ago."

Red-eye said, "Dang ye," automatically. His mind was on something else. "They's a place over there, now that you got me thinkin' Rooshian, that I heard about, a long time ago. I mean, what happened was a hell of a long time ago. A pack o' Rooshian hunters—you know them fellers that first come over, the rough-hided ones?"

"Promyshleniki, I think they called them."

"Promish . . . ? Yeah, well, something onchristian like that. Anyhow, this gang was prospectin' around over that way an' got in trouble with the Siwashes. Tacklin' their women, prob'ly. Siwashes, I hear, used to object to that, in the old days, afore they got onto putting 'em in tight pants an' sendin' 'em into town on Saddiday nights."

"Let's not start drooling over the klootches you've known in your time, Red-eye. Stick to the Russians."

RED-EYE gave him a severe look. "I was tryin' to tell ye. I could've hoped the colonel would find somebody with better manners to work with. Anyhow—this gang o' hunters took off up into the Valley o' Smokes. The Injuns were scairt to folly 'em up there. The party wintered up there, so the story is, an' built 'em a boat. In the spring, they poled, hauled an' floated down to deep water and got away. Now the funny thing is, Johnny, that the place they was supposed to have wintered is on all the maps. It's called Sovonoski. O' course, it's marked 'abandoned.' "

"Well, what's there, now?"

"I reckon I got my dogs hitched wrong end to. What I meant to say was that, even if it is on the maps, I dunno anybody who knows where it actually is. I dunno anybody who ever claimed to have seen it. Except one man."

"Who was that?"

"Sorenson. Ol' Skagway."

McQueen said, "Sorenson, eh? You know what happened to him, don't you?"

"I heard."

"Where do the maps put the place?"

Jameson dug a rolled-up "Kroll's Map of Alaska" from a heap of old newspapers and spread it out. He pointed with a gnarled forefinger. "Right there, Johnny. Shows her right at the head of Iliuk."

"I see. And you think that might be where they took Rehm?"

"T'be honest, Johnny, up till the time you mentioned Rooshians, I hadn't thought about it. Y' know, son, as fer as the Army's concerned, I'm carried on the payroll as jest a sort of glorified Boy Scout. They don't let me in on any secrets. Like I was tellin' you on the plane comin' from Naknek, I might've figgered it out f'r myself. I jest didn't."

"What do you think now?"

"I dunno, Johnny. There's one thing. If that yarn *is* true, an' them Rooshian fellers did go down to tidewater by boat, they must've built her some'eres above Iliuk. There ain't no other main waterway they could've used. But, countin' the Sovonoski River up there—" his finger traced another wavy blue line to the northeast—"there's lots o' places they could've started from. It's jest that that story sticks in my mind."

McQueen came to a sudden decision. "O.K.," he said. "We'll go at it from two directions. I told you Jake Johnson's in town. He claims to know something about that country. You go catch him before he gets on the down train, buy a couple of quarts and get him to come down here. Invite him for the week-end. See if you can get anything out of him. Help him cuss the Army for halfway through the first quart, and he'll probably tell you what he knows, if he knows anything. He should have heard that Sovonoski yarn, at least. See if he knows any more."

"He might," Jameson said quietly. "He might, at that. He and Sorenson were partners, for years."

McQueen stared. "Does he know what happened to Sorenson?"

"I'll see he gets told. O.K., Johnny. Will do. What'll you be up to, or should I ask?"

"Wipe the smirk off your face, first of all. I'm going into this budding metropolis and get some night-riding clothes, for one thing."

He looked down at his stained dungarees and the web-footed shoe pacs below. "From the look of that skyline, I guess these are no longer formal evening dress in Anchorage. Then—stop grinning, damn you—I'm going to hunt up Aasie. I heard she went to work for the CAA. She still there?"

"Last I heard, she was."

"Good. I'm going to get the names of everybody in the Territory who has ever registered a Globe Swift. After that, I think I'm going to pay a call on an old friend."

Charley chuckled. "Wouldn't be a big hunk of wolverine meat named Morse Mixon, would it?"

"It would. Why? What do you know about that?"

"Nothing much. 'Cept I hear Morse has been sayin' that you fouled him, that night in the street at Homer."

McQueen said, "Huh! You can tell Mr. Mixon, for me, that he is perfectly correct. Any time I don't foul Mixon is when I can't find the chance."

CHAPTER V

BRIGHT LIGHTS—SHADY CHARACTERS

McQUEEN had walked down Fourth Avenue in Anchorage at least once a year ever since the middle of the war. Nevertheless, he was startled all over again each time at the new size of the place. Anchorage was growing that fast. Before now, it had been the numbers and the polyglot aspect of the people which had been most remarkable. This time, it was the physical appearance of the town itself which was astonishing.

War and postwar handicaps to building were evidently relaxing and high piles of stone, steel and glass were rising all along the street, shutting out the great ramparts of the Chugaches to the east which had always been the looming backdrop against which the daily drama of the mighty little city was played.

And the people jostling each other along the crowded sidewalks were still changing. Fewer and fewer were the shoepacs and jeans; the parkas and mukluks. They were far outnumbered now by pressed trouser legs and gleaming nylons. And less than ever of the trouser legs were O.D. A hell of a time, McQueen thought, to see that.

He set about his personal errands, forthwith. He stopped at the bank and cleaned out his account, the last of his wartime loot painfully garnered at poker tables in alert shacks all the way from Karachi to Bournemouth. After his completely un-industrious year down the Kenai, the roll he stuffed in his pocket was none too fat.

"About time I was back on a payroll," he thought. Ten minutes later, in the first clothing store he came to, the thought occurred to him again. Prices were fantastic, in this boom town, served by transportation which had always been intermittent at best.

The clerk shrugged at McQueen's mutterings. "It's the freight," he told McQueen, the standard Alaskan alibi.

"Yeah!" McQueen regarded the two-dollar shirt for which he had just been asked ten. "They must've flown this number up on the President's private plane."

He surrendered his black, pirate's bush and about six inches of hair in a barber chair, and changed to his new cheechako clothes in the shop's shower-room. He made a bundle of the discarded jeans and pacs to be referred to again, he hoped, as soon as posible, and checked it with the barber.

Then he dropped into a shiny new chrome and nickel "cocktail lounge"—Shade of Soapy Smith!—for a couple of the drinks he had been promising himself ever since a certain moment the previous afternoon. He called Aasie Gowen at the CAA office from there, and made a date for lunch.

Aasie Gowen was an old friend. She had gotten him out of one bad jam, during the war, and into another, the now famous Homesteaders' War, so he supposed the status was about quo. There were, however, a number of excellent and fairly obvious reasons why it would be difficult to bear Aasie any grudges, under any circumstances. Every man in the Territory who had his eyesight would have understood.

Even so, McQueen was not at all pre-

pared for what he saw when she came in a little later to keep the date. The last time he had seen Aasie, down on her Kenai homestead which she had had to leave after the opening shot in the Homesteaders' War had killed her husband, she had looked good enough to McQueen in standard pants and pacs.

But it wasn't at all the same blonde who came in the door in some kind of a black dress that was very fond of her. Below the dress, there were a pair of smooth, shining architectural features which it had been a plain crime to hide in pants.

McQueen came off his bar stool and gulped. She looked up and down his gray-suited length and cried, "Johnny McQueen! But how nice you look, all dressed up. I haven't seen you without those whiskers for so long that I'd forgotten you were pretty."

McQueen recovered his balance. "As you told me the last time I saw you in town, I was getting to smell too much like a sourdough. How do you like this stuff the barber has just dunked me in?"

Aasie wrinkled her nose. "Smells more like Old Taylor to me."

"Could be. Swarm up and have one."

She shook her head. "I'm a working girl. No lushing before sundown. You invited me to eat."

McQueen looked through the archway leading to the adjoining restaurant. "So I did. How about in yonder, not too far from the bar?"

A WAITRESS found them a booth. The dining room was crowded, as everywhere else, but the hubbub was a good screen for conversation. As soon as the girl left with their orders, McQueen got down to business.

"You working for the Two people again, Aasie?"

"Are you?"

McQueen laughed. "Forget either of us asked. O.K. Are you working for me?"

"Not until you make it legal."

McQueen glanced again at what he could see of the black dress. "That," he said, "might be arranged. Seriously, though—"

She broke in. "I *was* serious."

"Look, dammit! Stop distracting me. I need to know something."

Aasie sighed. "All right, Johnny. I guess I was just fated to take in washing. Whom can I seduce for you?"

"Who would you have to, to find out what people have Globe Swifts registered in Alaska?"

"No one, fortunately. I happen to have that information."

McQueen raised an eyebrow. "Right at your fingertips?"

"Another gentleman who has a certain influence with CAA is also interested. We got the dope for him this morning."

No, McQueen thought, Colonel Frayne had not seemed the type to waste any time, at all.

"Well? Is it restricted?"

"No, I guess not." Her brow wrinkled in a little frown and she asked, "Must I tell you, Johnny?"

"I won't beat it out of you, if that's what you mean. Not right here and now, at least. But, yes, I can get it other ways, if that's it."

She sighed. "I'm sure you can. I suppose I know what you're up to. My reluctance is purely personal. Because there are only six Swifts registered. Two in Fairbanks, two in Juneau, one at Buby and one in Anchorage. You can probably guess, now, who owns the local one."

McQueen sighed with her. "Morse Mixon."

"That's right."

"I knew it. It would have to be Mixon. Don't feel too bad about it, Aasie. In the first place, he was already on my trap line. In the second, I can lick Mixon."

"I heard you could. Only—I saw you after you had done it, remember? It was hard to tell by looking who had whipped whom."

McQueen said, "Nuts, he never touched me. But don't worry. I got no more desire to tangle with that guy than you have."

"I have none at all."

"I meant, than you have for me to. No, Aasie. I don't think Morse is going to turn out to be the villain in this piece. I am afraid Morse is playing with some bad little boys, but I'm not sure he knows it. I'll have to find out."

"Bad little *boys?*"

McQueen looked at her. "I guess you're on the payroll, all right. And what do you know about *that?*"

Aasie Gowen—then just old Nils Rog-

ness' daughter from Fairbanks—had worked for Intelligence during the war. McQueen's present possession of his good health was due to that and to her able assistance in a certain crisis. She was a very good girl to know, for a number of reasons, not all of them necessarily visible.

She was saying, "Nothing good."

McQueen grinned. "That's not the way I hear it. I hear it's very good."

Aasie sniffed. "I'm sure you'll be wasting no time in going to look for yourself. I suppose you'll call it strictly a matter of business."

Soberly, McQueen told her, "I hope to hell I don't forget it's business. I've no desire to make the close acquaintance of any blow-torches."

AASIE went back to work and McQueen retrieved his various parcels. He hired a taxi to take him back to Bootlegger's Cove. When he walked in the cabin door, Red-eye and Jake Johnson were maintaining close surveillance over a two-thirds-emptied fifth of bourbon on the table.

They both hooted at McQueen's appearance. In fact, they became even more personal than that.

Jake said, "Red-eye, you smell what I smell?"

Charley cogitated. "I smell 'er, all right, Jake. It's jest a leetle hard to identify, though. Was I twenty years younger—'r mebbe ten—I c'd 've told you *jest* where the boy got that on his clothes. Now, I'm a mite ondecided betwixt Big Annie's and Corinne's."

Old Jake sat up with such an exaggerated start that he bumped the table leg. The bottle tilted but Red-eye righted it with a lightning snatch.

Jake said, "I 'pologize! But I jest had me a horrid thought. Red-eye, y' don't suppose that's advertisin', do ye? Johnny couldn't be *workin'* for one o' the girls, now, could he?"

McQueen picked up the bottle and poured himself a drink. Both watched the operation anxiously. He said,. "All right, you old trap-robbers. Enjoy yourselves. I suppose you have to make allowances for a man when he gets so old there's nothing he can do but talk about it."

Jake was insulted. "Lissen!" he crowed. "I c'n still out-run, out-jump 'r out—"

"O.K., Jake. O.K. Out-lie me, I'll admit. What was the idea of telling me you knew that Iliamna country? I talked to a man in town who told me you'd never been on that side of the Inlet in your life."

"An' who was that skunk?"

"Never mind. He told me."

"An' who tol' me he wanted to go over there t' git a bear? Red-eye jest set there and tol' me you jest come back from there. What about *that?*"

"Well," McQueen asked reasonably, "did Red-eye tell you I *got* a bear?"

Jake thought that over. "No," he admitted. "He said you didn't. Red-eye allus was a lousy guide. You really want to go over there, Johnny? In them clothes?"

"Never mind my clothes. Could you really take me?"

"I shore as hell could. Ol' Skagway Sorenson an' I have been over dum near ever' inch of that country."

"You with Sorenson when he found the pitchblende?"

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The old man's jaw dropped. "You know about that, do ye, Johnny? How'de ye find out?"

McQueen made his face blankly grave. "That same fellow."

"The one what says I don't know that country, eh?"

Jake turned to Charley Jameson. "Daggone it, Red-eye! Ye know, it's gittin' so ye jest can't trust nobody up here. Some feller's jest tryin' to keep me from goin' over there with Johnny. I told ye, I tried all summer to go an' the danged Army wouldn't let me. An' now some wolverine's got wind o' it, an' is tryin' to keep me out until he c'n git over there hisself. Tha's whut's happenin'."

"I asked you, Jake," McQueen reminded him, "about the pitchblende. You know Charley and me. We won't doublecross you."

Old Jake peered owlishly at them, each in turn. He said, "Shore, I c'n trust both o' ye. But why should I? Why do ye want to know?"

McQueen asked Jameson, "Charley, did you tell him yet what happened to Sorenson?"

Jameson shook his head. So McQueen told the story, leaving out only his source and the present whereabouts of Sorenson's widow. When he had finished, the old man reached for the bottle with a quivering hand. He didn't bother with his glass. Silently, McQueen rose and replaced the bottle with a fresh one from the plunder he had brought from town.

Johnson said, shakily, "Pore ol' Skagway. So that was the way the trail come to an end f'r him. Darn my ign'rant hide, anyway. If'n I hadn't give him that money, it wouldn't never've happened."

"What money, Jake?"

The old sourdough tilted the bottle again. He said, "Like you asked me, no, I wasn't with Skagway when he found that ore. I was up to the Railroad Horspital, havin' a case o' shingles. Allus used to be gettin' the dang things jest at the wrong time. But he come back an' told me. You was tellin' me, Johnny, about how I threw all that Kuskokwim money away. But I didn't. Not the hull of it. I bought a half share in this pitchblende mountain from Skagway. Twenty thousand, I give him."

Jameson spoke up, for the first time. "Did he file on it, Jake?"

"It wa'n't open f'r filin'. They was still arguin' about makin' a National Park, 'r somethin' like that. We decides to wait until after the daggone war an' maybe somebody'd have more sense."

"What have you got to show you bought in with Sorenson?" McQueen asked.

"Nothin," Johnny," the old man told him, simply. "I didn't need nothin'."

Of course, he wouldn't. Nor had Sorenson, actually, had anything to sell. Yet, amongst the fraternity to which they both —along with Charley Jameson—belonged, their rights would be as thoroughly respected as if all the lawyers in Philadelphia had worked on the papers.

McQUEEN finally asked the real question, hoping he would get an answer. "Where was it, Jake?"

The old man peered at him, plainly in distress. He didn't want to hurt McQueen's feelings by any appearance of suspicion, yet it was against every ingrained principle to answer such a query.

Understanding that, McQueen said quietly, "There's only one reason I want to know, Jake. I don't want to see anything happen to you like happened to Skagway. I wouldn't give two bits for all the pitchblende in creation."

Jake tugged his whiskers. "All right, Johnny. Ye know I don't distrust ye nor Red-eye. I was jest figgerin' to ask Red-eye did he want to throw in with me, anyway. I'll tell ye. She's at Sovonoski. Some-'eres near."

McQueen exchanged a glance with Jameson. He said, "I guess we'll go on that bear hunt tomorrow, Charley. I'll see if I can borrow that T-50 again and we'll fly over. How about those Scouts?"

Red-eye nodded. "All right, Johnny. I'll git a message out to 'em on the raddio tonight. Where ye want to meet 'em and how many?"

"We had better meet them up Iliuk where you last saw that . . . big bear. And how many have they got?"

"There's mebbe a half a dozen down to their base camp, now."

"A half dozen!"

Charley chuckled. "One o' them Cut-throats goes a long way, Johnny. They're like the Texas Rangers used to be."

"What do you mean 'Cut-throats'?"

"Some call 'em that after the fella who started 'em, durin' the war. 'Castner's Cutthroats.' They're what you call sort of rough characters."

"Are they really any damn good?"

Jameson nodded. "They're good."

"O.K. So be it. We've got all the outfit we need, right here. We can start as soon as the ship is ready, in the morning."

"All right, son. It'll take them the best part of a day to run up the lake, even in the J boat."

"I've got a better reason than that to stay in town tonight. I've got another bear hunt on my mind."

"Shore, son. Well, if we ain't goin' no place till mornin', I reckon I c'n give a little more attention to my drinkin'."

He reached for the bottle, stopped with his hand in mid-air.

"By the way, Johnny," he asked mildly, "how d'ye spell that? Bear, I mean."

Toward sundown, old Jake weaved his way to a bunk and tumbled in. He was snoring before he hit the blankets. Charley walked over and took a look at him.

"I guess he's safe for the evenin'. I expect I better git holt of Colonel Frayne and get that raddio on its way. Where d'ye figger to be, son? Jest in case there's any messages?"

"Mixon's new trap, out by the lake. At least, I'm going to begin there."

Old Charley regarded him quizzically. "They's two things I wouldn't do out there, if'n I was you, Johnny. Fust off, I wouldn't have anything to do with that draw game. The boys tell me that the stud games ain't quite so bad. Morse gives you sort of a run for your money. And the second is—well, I'd blind my eyes while I walked by the check-room."

"Frayne told me about her. You know who she is, don't you?"

Jameson nodded. "I know. I also know that, if I was your age, I'd have trouble rememberin' it."

CHAPTER VI

SUCKER GAME

McQUEEN took old Charley's advice to the extent of putting those two admonitions high on his program for the evening. He had long ago learned that he was no standard model of a counter-espionage agent. All the small success he had had, the one other time he had been pitchforked into such a detail, came from stepping on people's toes hard enough to make them lose their heads first.

Morse Mixon, as McQueen knew of old, had a very sensitive set of toes. The draw game Charley had mentioned ought to turn up some possibilities. McQueen meant to see.

The other, the widow lady in charge of the check-room, promised to be a more intricate problem. When McQueen paid off his taxi in front of the Lake Club's painfully rustic portico, he had as yet come up with no particular plans as to solving it.

The foyer into which a cold-eyed doorman ushered him was also rustic, with beamed ceiling and pine-paneled walls. But it was big and polished enough to make McQueen give a mental whistle. It seemed to be quite a layout Mixon had fixed himself.

Then he came to the check-room and stopped thinking about Mixon for a moment. The girl behind the counter wasn't very tall and the counter was, considering what it obviously hid, much too high. But what was visible above it looked about as little like the top half of a sourdough's widow as anything McQueen could imagine.

Raven-black hair was pulled smoothly back from a red-lipped, oval face. Below it, more black satin about half covered the most eye-arresting chest McQueen had seen in many a moon.

McQueen skidded to a stop which was only partially voluntary. He said, "And I don't have a hat! Is there any place in town open where I could go and get one?"

Long lashes lifted and a pair of black eyes like polished onyx surveyed him briefly while a faintly husky voice told him, "It is not required. We will let you in without one."

McQueen waited for the smile and finally got it, also brief but very satisfactory. Obviously, she didn't chew tobacco.

He said, "I'll find one somewhere and bring it back before you shut up shop."

In the lounge, the only illumination came from wall sconces, not too numerous, leaving the corners deep in shadow. McQueen saw no one he knew and took a stool at the better lighted bar to feel out

the situation. He had ordered his second drink when a uniform paused at his elbow.

McQueen looked up along the six and a half feet of it and said, "Evening, Colonel. Have a drink."

"Hello, McQueen. Thanks, I have one, over at a table. I'm with Mrs. Gowen. Would you like to come over?"

Following the Army man across the cockpit-sized dance floor, McQueen was not at all surprised at the meeting or the invitation. Frayne was known to the public at large as the area Intelligence chief. There was no more point trying to hide that than his uniform.

It was useful to have the head man out in front. People would come and tell him things, without trouble or inconvenience. It was then up to Frayne to tell which were phony and which were not. McQueen didn't envy him his job.

Nor was he surprised to see Aasie. He said, "I thought you'd be out here. Matter of fact, that's why I came."

"I was afraid you'd be. And that *is* why I came."

Frayne lowered himself into his chair and picked up his drink. "I see you two need no introduction."

"No," Aasie said. "I've known Mister McQueen for quite a long time."

McQueen thought she over-emphasized that "Mister." Aasie was probably going patriotic again. He decided to put her in her place.

"Oh, sure," he said. "I knew her when her name was Rogness."

"At least," Aasie told him, instantly and sweetly, "it was my own name."

McQueen winced. When he had met Aasie, on that gum-shoeing detail in Fairbanks, he had been masquerading as a draft evader named Jerry Mason.

Colonel Frayne drank and beamed on them both. He said placidly, "Myself, I have a wife and five kids. That is what that sort of thing often leads to."

McQueen thought it best to change the subject. He told Frayne, "We're going to take another try at that bear tomorrow, Colonel. If we can find an airplane to take us over."

Frayne nodded pleasantly. "Should be fun. And I'm sure you'll have no trouble about the plane."

He gave McQueen one casual glance, enough to tell him that the T-50 would be ready, on call. Then he said, "Then I suppose you will be making the most of your last night in town, won't you?"

McQueen thought he'd better not look at Aasie. He said, "Wel-l, maybe not the most of it, but—I think I'll look in on the game for awhile."

Aasie's gaze was elsewhere. She was watching a medium-sized brunette who had come from the direction of the checkroom and was walking past the bar on her way to the ladies' room. McQueen watched, too, but the light was bad. It high-lighted black satin in only the most prominent places. Those places, however, seemed to him to be ideally distributed.

Aasie said, "I hope it's the poker game you have in mind."

Frayne helped again, smoothly. Evidently a wife and a family of five put a man in practice. "I expect to look in up there myself, before I leave. I don't play but I'll try to bring you some luck."

McQueen finished his drink with them and excused himself. He felt the chill in Aasie's nonchalant good-bye, but it couldn't be helped. He had work to do. And there was still Joe Douglas.

There had been Joe Douglas.

THE POKER room was on the second floor. The bartender pointed to the stairway without comment. Upstairs, it opened into a long, quiet room with half-partitions along one side separating the players into three stud games and two four-five-six tables.

At the far end, there was a larger, better-appointed table under a shaded drop-light. Five men were seated at it, with a space left between two of them. It was almost as if they were waiting for someone.

McQueen bought chips at the cashier's counter with the last of his roll. What he got lay easily in the palm of one big hand. He asked the cashier, "How long do you suppose these will last down yonder?"

He jerked his head toward the far table. The cashier, another cold-eyed character, smiled with his teeth and said, "Depends on how you play them, sir."

McQueen looked down again at his hand and grumbled, "Have to play these mighty close. How's my credit? Name's John McQueen."

The cold eyes narrowed. The slit mouth

beneath said, "I'll check and let you know at the table."

McQueen walked down the room to the big table. The dealer nodded him to the vacant seat, wordlessly. McQueen sat down and paid his ante on the first few hands, throwing the cards in without a glance.

Studying the other four, he decided that trouble would come from the small, rat-chinned hustler type on the dealer's left, and the big, bulky man on his own left hand. Naturally so; since the seat between had been so obviously left for him. They had him right between the jaws of the trap.

The bulky man wasn't quite so easy to identify. He was dressed in a rumpled blue suit over a faintly odorous flannel shirt, like any sourdough dressed for town. His eyes were wide and bland in a round, unlined face. He had a tiny, cupid's bow mouth which turned up at the corners in a fixed, babyish grin. The stooge of the piece, McQueen finally decided.

The bald, gnome-like little dealer was plainly a houseman from away back. What he did or didn't do with the deck in his fingers would depend on what kind of a house Mixon was running. Knowing Mixon of old, McQueen was pretty sure of what kind that was.

The cashier appeared silently at McQueen's elbow with a folded slip of paper. McQueen spread it between his fingers and read: *The joint's yours, M. M.* Then, in parentheses below, *After they take you, you can settle with me.*

McQueen showed it to the cashier, who nodded. McQueen held up a finger.

"Five blues, sir?" There was a derisive note in Fish-eye's voice.

"Ten yellows, Jackson," McQueen told him. "One thousand, please."

He said it loudly, watching the others. They all smiled sweetly.

From that point, McQueen stepped in and pushed hard. They knew that was what he was doing and they called him early and often. Once in awhile, he helped his hands on the draw, but not enough. At the end of two hours, he had had to signal the cashier twice, doubling each time, until the small heap of vari-colored chips in front of him stood for seven thousand dollars.

Then he filled two pair and pulled back a fair pot. He thought he might have three thousand in front of him, or a little less. Immediately after that, there was an indefinable change in the tempo of the game. Something in the air told him that the time was close at hand.

On the next hand, as his last card fell in front of him from the little dealer's rapid fingers, Colonel Frayne walked in and lounged carelessly against the wall.

The dealer glanced at Frayne angrily and a little nervously. His eyes flicked up, ostentatiously, to a sign which announced: NO SPECTATORS IN THE GAME ROOM, PLEASE!

It seemed the colonel didn't believe in signs and the little dealer decided not to make a point of it.

McQueen picked up his hand and skinned it back. He saw four large, beautiful kings surrounding a red deuce. He laid them down carefully in front of him and lit a cigarette.

He thought, "Good God! Do I really look that simple? Can it be they would try to pull anything as old and hairy as that on me?"

IT WAS a gambler's trick so ancient that he had never seen it; only read about it. He checked his memory for the exact line-up of cards on top of the deck in the dealer's hands, ready for the draw.

By the time they drew, everybody between himself and the dealer would have dropped. He would, naturally, draw one, presumably to two pair, a flush or straight. Or he could play it pat, pretending he already had the flush, straight or full-house.

The fat man on his left, who was going to stay, albeit with many protests and much groaning, would draw three. He would already have a pair of aces.

Therefore, there must be a waste card on top of the deck. The next two were aces. No matter which way McQueen drew, the fat man would get the two aces, totaling four, and dire disaster for one Johnny McQueen.

That gentleman drew on his cigarette and chuckled, making no secret of it. The dealer frowned at such lack of etiquette, or experience, or both, and nodded to Rat-face.

"Up to you."

Rat-face said, "I'll crack it f'r a couple blues."

The next man passed. McQueen, his hand still on the table, said mildly, "And a thousand."

Rat-face hadn't expected to have to start crying quite so soon. His maiden effort wasn't brilliant. He moaned, "Whut a helluva place for a man with a measly little pair."

But he paid. Number five dropped. Rat-face leered knowingly, called, and raised another thousand.

McQueen painstakingly counted his chips. He pushed them out.

"There's the thousand. And nine-ninety-five more."

This time, Fatso was prepared. "What you two dawg-bit so-an-so's tryin' to do to me, 'sides whipsaw me between yuh? An' I don't think either one uh yuhs got a dawg-goned thing. It's a helluva way to play poker, 'at's all I c'n say!"

But, again, he paid. Rat-face, the fish now securely on the hook, threw in with a snarl. McQueen thought his acting as bad as his disposition. Cue-ball, the dealer, said, "Called all around. Cards?"

Cue-ball looked at McQueen. McQueen picked up his hand, chose the two black kings for harmony, and tossed the two red ones and the red deuce to the center of the table.

"Three, please," he said blandly.

The little dealer's hand in front of him were rigid as stone. Then they began to twitch, ever so slightly. McQueen watched

them, pointedly. From the tail of his eye he saw Colonel Frayne, grinning faintly, leave the wall and move up closer.

Cue-ball's adam's apple jumped. "Wha . . . how many was that?"

McQueen was surprised. "Three."

At his other side, Fatso came to life. He croaked, "But, you—you bet like—"

McQueen kept his eyes on the dealer. "I did. Part of the game, I understood. You mean you don't think I can win with a pair? But I'm going to help them. I'm sure I am. When I get my three cards!"

McQueen stabbed the little dealer with a sudden look. "Three cards, I said. I'll have those three on top, please."

Fatso mumbled something about a cut. Cue-ball gave him a disgusted glance and slowly peeled off the top three. McQueen glanced down at two aces and another deuce.

Fatso took three. McQueen beamed. "Two pair here," he announced politely. "I hope you didn't draw threes."

The bulky man, his round cheeks sagging, looked down at McQueen's aces and

McQueen stabbed the little dealer with a sudden look. "Three cards, I said. I'll have those three on top, please."

kings and silently pushed his hand away. It looked as if the backs were burning his fingers.

McQueen scraped the table, dropped the double handful of chips in his pocket, said, "Thank you, gentlemen. Most enjoyable."

He carried his pocketful back to the cashier. Fish-eye counted them carefully, handed McQueen's I.O.U.'s back to him, then said, "If you'll step in the office, sir—"

"What for? I gave you nine thousand, three hundred, in chips. I'll take the difference."

"Certainly, sir. We'd prefer to pay you in the office."

Frayne appeared at McQueen's elbow. "Quite a pot, that was. Quite a pot. What was in it?"

"I'll show you, Colonel," McQueen promised. "Or, at least, a sizable part of it, just as soon as this monkey decides to fork over."

The cashier looked up at that, glanced again at Frayne, then reached for the cash box. McQueen counted the money and stowed it away.

Then he said, "All right. Now, I'll see the boss. Lead the way."

MORSE MIXON was almost as wide as the desk in front of him was long. It wasn't a small desk, either. McQueen smiled at him, but he watched. Morse hadn't changed. He was better dressed in a quietly prosperous fashion, and the huge paw holding the cigar looked a little whiter and softer. But the blue beard still sprouted on that heavy, broad jaw and his eyes were the same slaty gray.

He growled, "If I had your damn luck, McQueen!"

"What would you do with it?"

"I wouldn't even have to know. It'd fall in my lap without thinkin'."

"Well, since you don't have my luck," McQueen told him, "I'd try thinking for a change. You wouldn't waste time—and twenty-three hundred bucks—trying to pull anything as raw as that on me. Where'd you ever dig up those two-bit burglars, anyway?"

Mixon sighed. "Fella has to take what he can get, these days. All the good dealers are down in Las Vegas, I guess."

"What was the idea, Morse? Why did you want me on the hook so bad?"

"I wanted to offer you a job again, McQueen. I thought I'd fix it so that, this time, you couldn't turn me down."

"Why do you want me working for you? Think that will make it easier to slip a knife in my back?'

Mixon tried to look hurt. "We've had our trouble, I admit. I won't say I was wrong, all the time. But I admit that what you done to me wasn't personal, on your part."

"Hell it wasn't!" McQueen muttered, remembering some old aches and pains.

Mixon waved that aside. "Oh, that! What's a poke in the nose amount to, when it comes down to business? That don't bother me. In fact, that's the main reason I want you. If you're with me in something, nobody would ever think it was fishy."

"You need a front again, is that it? But what's the difference between an honest pilot and the other kind, Morse? If there is another kind. They all just fly the airplane."

"It ain't a pilot I want to hire, McQueen."

"No? What is it?"

Mixon leaned over the desk. "You interested?"

"I'll listen."

"Absolutely legitimate." Mixon's voice was almost pleading. "Absolutely. It's just that, with me frontin' it, like you say, nobody'd believe it."

"I'm still listening."

"There ain't much to it. Except about a quarter-million bucks a year, once we get her goin'. But did you hear about the guys who are organizin' huntin' parties in the States and flyin' 'em in for a couple weeks? Chargin' from two thousand up, mostly up, per each?"

"No," McQueen admitted. "I hadn't heard."

"Well, that's the deal. I'm buildin' a lodge over 'crost the Inlet. I want you to run it. And run the feeder plane service over to Anchorage. We'll catch a few locals as well as the Outside big dough. A nice little place over there with a good chef, a good barkeep, as many bunks as we can stick in her. And all the shootin' they want right off the doorstep."

McQueen almost forgot what he was

there for. Exactly such a project had been in his own mind for about a year. It could be done, and easily, with a little backing. The catch in this occurred to him.

"You say you're building it. Where?"

"Over above Iliamna. Place that used to be called Sovonoski, in the old days. Pretty little valley, good water for float planes, best huntin' in the Territory."

"Sovonoski, eh? Who's doing the building?"

Mixon said, "You know that's closed up there, now. But I get it that everything north o' Katmai is goin' to be opened up for homesteadin' pretty soon. So my boys are just sorta layin' things out for when we can really get goin'. Fixin' up some buildings and so forth."

"How are you feeding them?"

"By plane. How else?"

"With that Swift?"

"That and the Cessna. Mostly the Swift. Why?"

McQueen stared at the big man and considered. Morse Mixon was a strictly malo hombre, in most ways. He had dealt in hot fur; he had burnt out homesteaders down the Kenai; he was still running honky-tonks. Legally speaking, he wasn't even clean of murder. But, by all those same tokens, he was about as far from a comrade as you could well imagine. He was for Morse Mixon, first, last and all the time. Something hit McQueen, right between the eyes.

He said, "Morse, your mother was a Russian, wasn't she?"

Mixon's brow furrowed. "Sure. She came from the old village of Chernofski. Why?"

"Who's flying the Swift for you?"

"Fella name of Nicholson."

" 'Fella name of Nicholson.' " McQueen mimicked. "Name of Nikulof, maybe. Where did you pick up the rest of the gang over at Sovonoski?"

"Here and there, around town. What the hell you talkin' about, McQueen?"

"Murder, my friend. Not plain, ordinary murder, either. I'm afraid your tail is in a crack again, Morse."

McQUEEN watched him narrowly. Mixon didn't have brains enough to be an actor. The befuddlement on his big blunt face was honest.

"Murder? Who'm I supposed to have knocked off, now? Damn you, McQueen! If I—"

"Save it, Morse. Even if you were smart enough to know what's been going on, I could be no safer in church. A character by the name of Frayne—Colonel Frayne of the U.S. Gumshoes—is watching that door right this minute, to make sure that I come out in the same shape as I went in. So I'll tell you. Your pilot 'Nicholson' and one of your other playmates shot and killed a soldier over on the Alagnak, yesterday. A big soldier, Morse. One they couldn't spare. General Douglas, Morse."

Mixon slumped back in his chair, his mouth gaping foolishly. "Nah, McQueen! Even you couldn't be that crazy. What would be the percentage in them doin' a thing like that."

"Take it from me that they did," McQueen assured him, briefly. "Whether this injured innocence of yours is an act or not remains to be seen. We'll be able to tell a good deal by your actions from this point on. You better play ball, Morse. If you don't you'll be looking at your third strike in a tougher game than even you have ever been mixed up in."

Mixon, staring, said, "You really mean it, don't you, McQueen? Ain't you going to tell me what it's all about?"

"Maybe. First, I'll tell you what I want. I want to meet that Gorman babe, from downstairs. Get her up here. Pretend I'm the guy with the dough, something like that."

Mixon picked up his house phone. With a rueful glance at McQueen's breast pocket, he said, "That won't be no lie."

Mixon replaced the phone. They waited. Morse said, "You're back with the Army again, huh, McQueen? How come you got time to waste with my hat-snatcher?"

"Sure it's a waste of time?"

Mixon grunted. "I wouldn't know. I got no time for such foolishness."

McQueen grinned. "You mean Alice is still watching you."

Alice was the brawny blonde with hairy forearms who might be Mixon's wife. At any rate, she was the only living person besides possibly McQueen of whom Morse was afraid.

Mixon grinned, sheepishly. "It ain't funny, McQueen. Well, good huntin'."

Katsa Gourin

"Thanks. Don't you know who that girl is? Ever hear of Skagway Sorenson?"

"Heard of him, sure. That's all. What about him?"

"He's dead, too," McQueen said. The tap on the door behind him came before he could say more.

He let the black satin in and closed the door behind her. At close range, and in toto, the contours under it were even more remarkable. He took a fresh grip on his good resolutions.

Morse introduced him as an old friend from down the peninsula and waddled over to mix a drink at a private bar. McQueen gave her the big chair and sat on the edge of Mixon's desk, looking down. It was quite a sight.

Mixon passed them a drink, then said, "Well, I got business downstairs. See you later."

"That's right," McQueen told him. "Don't go away. I've got more things to ask you about this Sovonoski deal."

He was watching those soot-lashed eyes. They widened satisfactorily at the name. Mixon growled, "Go ahead. Blab your head off."

He went out. McQueen pretended to explain. "You see," he told her, artlessly, "I'm going to work for Morse, too. We're going to start a hunting lodge over at a place called Sovonoski. That's what the old Russkies called it. We'll probably have to change the name."

He thought that it was probably unnecessary to take such pains to identify himself. Mixon's office was undoubtedly wired for eavesdropping. But the thing might as well be brought to a head as soon as possible.

So he stared at her over his drink. He shook his head in obvious puzzlement. "Don't think this is the old gag, Miss Gorman. But I know I've seen you before. You weren't up here during the war, were you?"

She smiled and moved her head in slow negation. "No, I wasn't. I'm sorry."

"No? Now that's funny. I don't often make a mistake like that. Not where a girl like you is concerned."

She laughed outright. But at him, not with him. Just as the curved lips opened, he felt an unmistakable pressure just beneath his left shoulder blade.

She said, still laughing, "Go ahead,

Colonel McQueen! Make one littlest movement and you will no longer have to worry about where you last saw me. You will find yourself where you can ask it of your friend General Douglas."

McQueen believed her. He froze where he was, his drink halfway to his mouth. He said slowly, "Mixon, you double-crossing bastard, is that you behind me?"

The man there spoke to the girl. "What do we do with him, Katsa?" The voice was Fatso's, high and babyish, of the poker game.

She rose and faced McQueen. "We'll take him out. He does not seem too bright but it will nevertheless be thought necessary to interrogate him. Let me see if he has arms."

To McQueen, she snapped. "Stand up!" He straightened, lazily, and she patted his armpits expertly. As she ran her hands down his trouser-legs, he drawled, "Don't get so personal."

She slapped him with a full-armed swing, the heel of her hand surprisingly hard against his mouth. McQueen tasted warm blood.

He said, with feeling, "You damned she-devil!" and she struck him again. McQueen subsided.

Fatso jabbed the gun muzzle an inch or so into his back and turned him around. Back of the desk, a doorway set into the pine paneling was open on a narrow stairway. At the bottom, the gun steered him out into the black dark at the rear of the building.

CHAPTER VII

VALLEY OF TEN THOUSAND SMOKES

A CAR was parked close against the wall. The blackhaired girl rummaged in the glove compartment and came out with a pair of long-chained handcuffs. She clipped McQueen's arms together at his back, fastening the cuffs just above the elbows. Fatso poked him into the rear seat and climbed in after him.

The girl took the front seat beside the driver's and they waited. McQueen thought in anguish, "Frayne, dammit, where are you?"

His frantic telepathy didn't work. The figure which finally loomed through the dark came and slid in behind the wheel. There was a whispered consultation in the front seat. Then they pulled McQueen out again.

By this time, he had himself fairly well oriented as to compass directions. The way in which the new man turned him, after taking over the gun from Fatso, led to the lake and the float anchorages.

McQueen thought of yelling for help, gun or no gun in his back. But, when Fatso gave up the pistol to the newcomer, a thought struck him. It wasn't a hundred yards from Mixon's joint to the water's edge. He remembered that, from the previous morning. So, if they were not going to take him somewhere by car, they must be going to use a plane. Therefore, this new man could be the pilot, "Nicholson." Sensible or not, McQueen decided to ride it out.

Also, fantastic as it seemed, Colonel Frayne might not be interested. The black satin job had said "Colonel" McQueen. Somebody must have told her that. Even if she had had McQueen docketed before, and simply translated, by guess or mistake, "ex-Colonel" into "Colonel," there were other things. There must be some reason that this gang could operate so freely right under the Army's nose.

McQueen decided to play along. Except scream, there wasn't much else he could do.

The time for screaming was about over, anyway. They had arrived at the end of Mixon's private pier, fifty yards out over the lake. Here and there, faint reflections from open hangar doorways and airplane riding lights glimmered on the black water.

The bulky outlines of two planes showed close at hand. The unidentified man stepped into a flat-bottomed skiff and paddled out to the larger. McQueen heard the scrape of mooring cables drawn through ring-bolts. Fatso handed the gun to the girl, Katsa—who all but buried it in McQueen's left kidney and hauled on a line. A big plane, larger than a Swift, loomed up beside the narrow finger pier and a wing came swinging around over the platform like a great gray bat.

The pilot came up out of the skiff and muttered something in gutturals. Katsa stepped through the open cargo door and turned. Fatso unfastened the cuffs at Mc-

Queen's elbows and prodded him in. The opportunity was so good, at that moment, that he all but forgot he had made up his mind to a plane ride.

A moment later, he was glad he had waited. The jerry-built pier creaked under heavy, hurrying footsteps and a third man came under the wing.

Morse Mixon's deep bass was angry. "Nick? What the hell's goin' on?"

The man McQueen had guessed was the pilot answered. "I've got a load for across the Inlet."

"Load? Load of what?"

"Take a look."

The floor of the plane tilted as Mixon reached from the pier and put his weight on the door sill. He peered into the interior. Fatso snapped on the cabin lights, momentarily.

The big man grunted. "McQueen! What you been up to, now?"

"What I was about to ask you, Mixon, the next time I saw you."

Mixon looked at the other three, one at a time. He asked the pilot again, "What's the idea, Nick?"

The pilot said easily, "He got onto your idea for the lodge over there. And you know you've got no papers yet."

"He got onto it! I told him. I hired him, tonight, to run the joint."

"Yes?" The man's teeth were white in the dark. "Then what is wrong with us taking him over to show it to him?"

Mixon wasn't quick but he was no fool. And he had had his own considerable experience with violence. He said, "Yeah? In the middle of the night, with a gun in his guts?"

The man Mixon called Nick said, softly, "Petr! The light."

FATSO flipped the compartment light switch again. It showed a blunt, Lend-Lease .45 in Nicholson's hand. He gestured with it, the muzzle moving only a fraction of an inch across Mixon's middle.

"All right, Mixon. So you go, too. Get in!"

If it was staged, it was good. Very good. McQueen couldn't be sure it was acted, but he didn't trust anybody much, any more. However, he had nothing to lose.

He said, very fast, "O.K., Morse. If I move, be ready to jump in."

Nicholson snapped, "There will be no more talking," and Katsa hit him, simultaneously. McQueen had expected that and, this time, he had his mouth open far enough so that she got a handful of teeth.

She cursed him and lifted the pistol to strike with that. Fatso growled at her and yanked it out of her hand. He swung McQueen around and squeaked something unintelligible at the girl. She put the cuffs on McQueen's arms again.

Nicholson was holding Mixon at gun point in the other corner. It was close quarters for five people, considering the size of three of them, and Nicholson was making snarling noises which unmistakably meant hurry.

In the confusion she got the cuff firmly anchored on McQueen's left arm but she placed the right too low. He felt the thing go around the bulge of his forearm, below his elbow. With exultation, he clenched his fist, swelling the big flexors until they strained his sleeve. The black-haired wench jammed the cuff down tight, forcing it hard against his flesh.

The moment she took her hands away, McQueen relaxed his fist. He felt the constriction ease and the cuff begin to slip. He grinned to himself, in the dark, for the first time ceasing to envy all the peaceful people home safe in bed.

They put Mixon in the co-pilot's seat, Fatso behind him with the gun at his ear. Nick shoved the plane away from the pier and clambered in, dogging the door. He took his seat beside Mixon, snapped on his landing lights and started his engines.

Gunning them while he taxied clear, he shoved the throttles forward and slammed the Cessna across the lake into a take-off. McQueen gasped. If he had needed any more to prove to him who these characters were, that would have been enough. Only a Russian would fly like that.

Somehow, they got altitude over the black saw-edge of spruces ringing the lake and McQueen relaxed. He set his mind to feeling out every deviation in their course.

He was well enough oriented in the neighborhood to know when they turned northwest over the Inlet. The Cessna was, so far as he could tell, the civilian version of the T-50 he had flown over a nearly parallel route, the day before. Knowing

He shoved the Cessna's nose down into the thick, swirling fog as if he had it on a trolley track.

its cruising speed, he worked out their flight plan. If they were going directly into the Katmai area at the head of Iliuk, they would be in the air a good three hours.

It was now nearly two A.M., he estimated. At five, there should be, at this time of the year, a little daylight. Since there was little to be done before then except slide that loose cuff down and free his hands, he settled himself as comfortably as possible in his corner to do it.

Up front, the pilot and Mixon carried on a muttered conversation, mostly one-sided. Mixon's contribution was confined to a few angry grunts. Again, McQueen hoped that he had judged the big man correctly. Against the four of them, McQueen didn't think much of his chances. If Mixon were actually only a stooge, and had finally realized it, there should be little trouble in turning a few tables.

The band on his right arm dropped to his wrist. Quietly, he made sure that it would clear his hand, and then slipped it back. After that, he let himself doze.

A change in the rhythmic hammer of the engines brought him wide awake. Outside the windows, the solid cloud mass was pinkishly visible. The plane was definitely in a landing glide, the engines barely ticking over.

McQueen thought, "My god, the man is going to put her down blind! He really must know this neighborhood. Or he just doesn't give a damn."

It was undoubtedly a little of both. The driver was setting his course on some landmarks which McQueen could not see. Nevertheless, he shoved the Cessna's nose down into the thick, swirling fog as if he had it on a trolley track.

They broke into the clear a bare hundred feet above a narrow streak of still, black water between steep, rocky shores. McQueen gathered himself.

He had judged these people, "Nicholson" and Fatso, whom they called Petr, to be very tough, but not too quick. That probably wasn't true of the girl, but that was a chance which had to be taken. Still, she ran to speed rather than size and in this thing McQueen was about to start, weight was going to be the principal factor.

AS THE Cessna came down from its second bounce and began to squash in the water, McQueen lunged forward with the loose handcuff in his right hand, the chain swinging free, yelling to Mixon as he moved.

"Morse! Grab Nicholson!"

He flipped the chain loop over Fatso's head and yanked it tight across his throat, toppling him backward. As he engaged the chain, he whipped loose the cuff and caught it in his left hand, reaching for the fat man's gun with his right.

He got his hand on it just as he saw Mixon heave his huge body sideways, pinning the pilot against the opposite side. The wheel snapped forward and the plane yawed and tipped. It didn't have way enough left to go over.

Fatso was floundering between McQueen's knees. McQueen got half astride and sat on him. He saw that Mixon had the pilot well secured, one hand on his throat and the other on his right wrist. McQueen had had enough experience of his own with that bear-like grip to know it was not going to be soon broken in such close quarters.

That took care of two-thirds of the opposition. The female third left over was giving McQueen a rather interesting time. The sudden explosion of action had caught her unarmed except for ten razor-edged fingernails. With McQueen's first move, she had climbed his back like a cat and put them to work. McQueen, from the feel of his neck, thought he had best quiet her before he bled to death.

The trouble was, she was working on his left side, and that was the arm still handcuffed. He couldn't get at her with his right hand. So, with practically no regret at all, he lifted the pistol and rapped Fatso behind the ear with the barrel. The fat man slumped under him.

McQueen unwrapped the chain to free his left arm, then shook the screaming girl off his shoulders. She landed against the compartment wall with a thump. McQueen poked her in her satin stomach with the pistol muzzle and spoke, soothingly.

"Honey, maybe you think I wouldn't shoot a lady. Just you make one more swipe with those fingernails and I'll show you!"

He told Mixon, "There's a lot of rope back here. I'll hold the gun on 'em while you get 'em tied. Better start with the one you've got."

Mixon rumbled, "You heard 'im, Nick. Git back over the seat."

In the growing light, Nicholson was a blocky, round-headed man, slope-shouldered and shifty-eyed. He didn't look like much of a brain. McQueen was sure they didn't yet have the he-wolf. The cold light of morning told McQueen that the idea he had had, last night, about Frayne was ridiculous. Still—who in hell could have told the girl that he was 'Colonel' McQueen?

Mixon was a handy man with a rope and the knots his big hands could pull were indestructible. They tied Fatso last and McQueen found enough tape in the ship's first-aid kit to fashion some artistic gags for all three. He wasn't quick enough to get the strip across the black-haired girl's mouth before she spat at him, but he was expecting something like that and so he ducked in time to let her hit Mixon, instead.

Searching the plane, they turned up another pistol, also American G.I. McQueen gave it to Mixon.

Mixon asked, "Now that the party's over, what the hell's it all about? Who are these lugs?"

"Comrades. Russians."

"Russians! What they doin' over here?"

"Lots of people wish they knew."

Morse ruminated over that. Finally, he said, "Well, whadda we do now?"

McQueen pulled on his first cigarette since midnight, and thought. He said, "What we really ought to do, is crank up this kite and fly it to hell out of here. Deliver these—" he gestured toward the three stacked in the cargo compartment— "so-and-so's to people who can take care of 'em. Trouble is, I'm not sure I know just who those people are."

"Huh? What about this Colonel Frayne? He seems to be the big shot in this kind o' business."

"That's right. There's another thing, though. You've got a boarder—three of them—at this camp of yours that you don't know about. That is, I guess you don't."

"Your guess is right. I'm thinkin' I don't know much about anything."

"How big is your gang up here supposed to be? The rest of it."

"You tell me a Brown killed Robey, day before yesterday. With Pete and Nick here, that's three. I was payin' five."

"Only two left, eh?" He snapped the cigarette butt out a window with sudden decision. "O.K., we'll take a chance. Red-eye Jameson should be up here with some Army guys from Iliuk before night. I'd hate to risk anything happening to your boarders before then."

"I still don't know what you're talking about," Mixon grumbled. "Damned if I know why I shouldn't go ashore. I been payin' these guys—they been eatin' my grub—all summer. Why should I be afraid of 'em?"

Morse still hadn't quite gotten the idea. McQueen wished he were sure John McQueen had. But he had run his own neck in this noose; he might as well try to wriggle on through.

HE TOOK the driver's seat, cleared his throttles, and taxied across the narrow, fiord-like water in the direction Mixon pointed out. The queer, low-hanging cloud cover was lifting. It was now up to three hundred feet or so, and McQueen could see a little more of the scenery.

Generally, it was forbidding. The steep, rocky cliffs, dotted with patchy black spruce clumps, walled them in on either side. Great, gray tendrils of mist hung down like giant streamers every way he looked. There were striated clefts in the cliffs which seemed to draw them down. It almost looked as if they rose from the rocks rather than descended to them.

Mixon said that that was right. "Katmai," he said. "The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, they call it. Damn country's full of steam. Never freezes in winter. One reason I thought the suckers might go for this deal."

"Yes, but holy hell! What a country to fly in!"

"It's all right, once you get used to it. Nick never seemed to have much trouble."

McQueen looked down over his shoulder at the bullet-headed man. "That reminds me. If we're going in to meet some more of these hoods of yours, I should do something about this Nick. He was flying that Swift, down on the Afognak, yesterday, when your boy Robey shot Joe Douglas. I'd hate to get into any trouble ashore which would keep me from coming back to take care of him."

"Go ahead. Heave him out the door. He won't swim much in those ropes."

McQueen considered. "No, dammit," he sighed. "I can't do it. If he had shot Joe, I think I would. But he didn't; the other did. And I know he wasn't after Joe, anyway. It was Red-eye Jameson they wanted."

"What did they have against Red-eye?"

"He was the one who brought your boarder in. And I suppose they knew that, sooner or later, the old man would track him down. He got to nosing around too close."

Under Mixon's directions and McQueen's slow and careful piloting, the Cessna was coasting around a bend in the canyon walls. Morse said, "Right around that point. There's another cut that leads off from a little cove. That's the place."

As they rounded the perpendicular rock wall shutting off the tiny cove, the first thing McQueen saw held his whole attention. A great, gray amphibian of the Navy's Consolidated patrol bomber type was swinging from mooring lines running in to shore.

Mixon said, "What the hell! Is the Navy in on this deal, too?"

McQueen swore under his breath, as his

eye took in the details of rusted pontons and crooked, sloppily painted identification markings.

"Evidently," he said bitterly. "But not the right navy. So that's how the so-and-so's have been doing it! Damn the guy who invented Lend-Lease!"

Now that he saw the visible evidence, he knew it was simple enough. The distance to even the Soviet bases which he knew of, Okhotsk or Petropavlosk, was much less than 2,000 miles, well within the range of that boat. And there were undoubtedly new ones, closer, of which he had never heard. All over open water without a thing to interfere with them.

He said, "Mixon, I really led you into a deadfall, this time. Better pretend you never knew me."

The big man grunted. Morse was apt to be pretty single-minded at times, as McQueen had reason to know. He growled, "I dunno why. Don't forget that them buzzards are tied up in my front yard. I figure it's more up to them to explain than me."

luck too far. But the Cessna was coasting into the little bay and there was nothing to be done.

Less than fifty feet separated the two planes when Mixon said, "See that little gut runnin' back into the rocks over there? We fixed that up for a mooring, if you want to use it. I guess it was too small for that big baby."

McQueen saw it; a narrow tributary of

CHAPTER VIII

RED RUNAROUND

IF McQUEEN had had room enough to turn the Cessna, he would have done it and high-tailed it as fast as he could get flying room. He didn't need to see the man who stepped out on the amphib's wing with a sub-machine gun in his hands to know that, this time, he had pushed his

the bay. The wall was sheer on one side but the other sloped up to the small plateau or shelf on which he now saw buildings. There was a short pier and a gangway up to ground level.

He waved nonchalantly to the man with the tommy-gun and gunned his left engine, steering for the slot. The watcher evidently thought that logical, because he let them go in, without moving.

McQueen cut his switches and Mixon helped him tie up. He told the big man, "Well, now it's a question of how fast you can talk. And how soon somebody comes down here and finds our turkeys in the back seat. If Red-eye gets here first. . . ."

He left that unfinished. He preferred not to think about the possibilities, should Red-eye and the Scouts *not* get there.

They climbed the stairway to the flat

McQueen didn't need to see the man who stepped out on the amphib's wing with a sub-machine gun in his hands to know that, this time, he had pushed his luck too far.

and McQueen took the opportunity to look around. The little open pocket was nearly circular, about ten acres in size. Ringed around the edges, half dug into the sheer cliffs at the rear, were a dozen sod and timber shelters, rotted, grass-grown and ancient.

But there was also a new structure against the center wall, but of unbarked timber and shake roofed. It rested against a sloping portion of the cliff, the roof slanted down in prolongation of the grade, and looked to be a good eighty feet long.

Mixon said, "Yeah, that's what I thought they been doin' over here. Buildin' that. It's supposed to be the beginnin' of the main lodge."

Down in the bay, three men were coming ashore from the amphib in a rubber dinghy. Up on the gallery of the lodge, two more appeared. One came down the steps; the other stayed at the railing.

Mixon hailed the nearer. "Mike! What the hell's that thing out in the bay?"

McQueen watched the man approach. He was a nondescript type with a scraggly blond beard hiding snagged, brown teeth. He bared them in what passed for a grin.

"Hi, Morse. That? Why that's the Navy. Jest dropped in to pay a call. What you doin' over here?"

The man watching from the gallery called down, "Mixon! Who is that with you?"

The new voice was deeper and it blurred its consonants in the same way that Nicholson and the fat man's had. McQueen muttered, "Don't rile him if you can help it, Morse. Play along."

Mixon grunted, but he answered civilly, "New pilot, Waxman. I heard Robey got hurt day before yesterday, so I picked up a new man."

The man he called Waxman said, "I hadn't heard. How was Robey hurt?"

"He and Nick went bear-huntin', down the Afagnak. Nick said a bear got 'im."

"When did you see Nick? And where is he?"

"Back in Anchorage, to both questions."

They had reached the bottom of the dozen steps up to the gallery. McQueen looked up at Waxman. He was another bulky, bullet-headed copy of the pilot, Nicholson. His broad face was puzzled and suspicion slitted ice-blue eyes.

"Why didn't Nick come over with you?" he asked slowly. "How is it that he let you come alone?"

That was more than Mixon could take. "Let me!" he exploded. "Why, damn you, who pays you worthless bastards? What the hell do you mean, 'let me'? Nobody 'lets' me go anywhere!"

Waxman lifted a big-bored rifle from beside his leg and tipped the muzzle down at them. He said, "It may be all right, Mixon. But we will wait until the boss comes. Mikulak! See if they have arms."

The sandy man moved around them and lifted the two pistols. Mixon growled, "So that's your name, is it, Mike? I'm learning more damn things!"

McQueen muttered, "Such as who is this 'boss,' maybe? That I could use, myself."

THE THREE men from the amphib landed and came up the slope. McQueen tailed them with his eye. All three were wearing flying overalls, with no insignia. It didn't take much imagination to put red stars on the collars. Otherwise, they were in their thirties, shaven-skulled, and of the same blocky pattern.

The one in the lead swept McQueen and Mixon with a contemptuous eye, then spoke to Waxman in what McQueen assumed was Russian. He caught a word or two he thought he understood. Something about *"cllevy"* hurrying, and *"Bert b coooii,"* taking along.

It seemed that the airplane-driving comrades were in a bit of a rush to be on their way. They were waiting for somebody to show, before they could get going. Somebody or something they were supposed to take back with them.

They were in so much of a hurry, and they were telling Waxman about it in such unmistakable terms, that nobody seemed to think of going to check the Cessna. McQueen thanked the Lord for small favors and prepared himself for what came next.

It wasn't long in coming. Waxman made his last apology to the amphib captain and turned back to Mikulak. "Put them with the other. We will wait and see what is to be done with them."

Mikulak asked, "Mixon, too?"

Waxman nodded. "Until we hear what is to happen."

Mikulak dropped one of the pistols into his pocket and gestured with the other. "You heard. Inside, and up the stairs."

There was an upper story to the place; a long, unfinished loft under the slant of the roof from the cliff behind. Mikulak sent them up a rough staircase ahead of him and McQueen lifted the bar across the plank door at the top. Mixon followed him and they heard the bar drop behind them.

There were small shuttered windows at either end of the loft. A figure rose from a cot beneath one of them as McQueen and Mixon entered. A slim, blond man with a scrubby crew-cut grown fuzzily long, and quick, nervous hands.

He peered at them, near-sightedly, and sighed. "Well, gentlemen. What now?"

McQueen asked, "Doctor Rehm?"

Pale blue eyes lifted. "Don't you know? Or is this another clumsy trick?"

"Just guessing. We're P.W.'s, too. And it's no trick."

Rehm gestured wearily. "It really doesn't matter."

"The hell it doesn't!" McQueen said, grimly. "Tell me what I have to do to convince you. Because I want to know some things."

"For instance?"

"I thought there were three of you. Where're the others?"

"There were three. Beeman thought he could swim the lake and get away. I don't know what happened to him. And Emmons . . . they shot him, two weeks ago."

"Shot him! Why?"

"To show me that they meant business, so they said."

McQueen said, "So. Doctor, do you know who these people are?"

Rehm nodded. "I know."

"Friends of yours?"

The slender man's head came up. "Is that what it is? Why I have been abandoned?"

"Nobody's abandoned you. Not yet. What about my question?"

"My God!" Rehm said, bitterly. "Because I did not believe in atomic war, I'm no longer entitled to my country's protection. I knew I was sent on this wild goose chase because they wanted me out of the way, but I did not expect to be turned over to the NKVD for it."

"If you wanted protection, why didn't you take it when it was offered? And why the hell didn't you stay where the Army put you?"

Rehm said, "My friend, whoever you are, there was a matter of identification mentioned."

McQueen looked about him. "This place is wired for sound, I suppose?"

"I'm sure it used to be. While Beeman and Emmons were alive. They listened to us talk."

"Then you're just going to have to guess about me. What have you got to lose?"

"Not much, I suppose. All right. You asked me why I didn't stay where I was. I didn't, because a certain Colonel Frayne, of the Army Intelligence, wanted me moved to here."

"Frayne bring you here, did he?"

"It was at his order."

McQueen looked at Mixon. "Our hole card is all of a sudden a dirty deuce, Morse."

"You mean Jameson and them . . . "

"That's right. I'm afraid they won't be keeping their date."

Mixon growled, "Well, that's all right. But I'd still feel better if I knew what was goin' on."

"So would I." McQueen turned back to Rehm. "Have they got what they are after, yet?"

Rehm's eyes widened. "They have not. How did you know?"

"Just another guess. If they haven't, though, the showdown's close. Those guys out there in that PBY didn't come over here just for the ride. And they're in a hurry to get back. They'll want what they came for, and pronto. How have they tried, so far, to get it?"

"Mostly threats."

"Yeah. Well, I'm afraid that phase is over. Better set your teeth, Doc. The next will be ruggeder."

REHM started to say something but a new sound caught McQueen's attention. He whirled away from Rehm and Mixon and ran to the window nearest the bay. Through a crack in the shutter, he saw another plane come in for its landing in the lake. It disappeared behind the rocky point and the sound of engines died away.

"T-50," McQueen told the other two,

over his shoulder. "Air force marking. I couldn't see well enough to make sure but I think it's the same one I had, a couple of days ago. It can't be just a search plane."

"Why can't it?" Rehm asked.

"Because you'd never find that lake unless you knew it was there. You can't see it from the air, at all. That mixture of steam and fog never lifts. Why do you think nobody could find you before this?"

Mixon said, "If it ain't a search plane, what the hell is it?"

"That," McQueen told him, "is the gimmick. We'll see if she comes in here."

They waited, tensely. In a moment or two, the sound of engines came again, growing stronger. Then McQueen saw the ship come around the point and push a slow bow wave up against the big amphib. Straining his eye through the crack, he watched to see who was aboard.

The pilot, whoever he was, evidently saw the Cessna ahead of him in the slip. McQueen heard him yell something at the amphib and two men stepped down onto their pontons to take the T-50's lines. The rubber dinghy came out from shore to take the newcomers off.

There were two of them. McQueen gasped as he recognized the first. In dungarees and jacket, a bright bandanna twisted around her head, Aasie Gowen stepped ashore ahead of a squat, heavy-shouldered man in Army uniform.

She seemed to be, at that distance, a little uncertain about the business. She wanted to hang back at the water's edge, but the soldier took her arm and pulled her forward. Jerking her arm away, she went along with him toward the house.

The squat man was in O.D.'s and a combat jacket, the black, barred patch of a senior non-com on the sleeves. McQueen had never seen him before.

He turned back to Mixon and Rehm. "Well," he told them slowly. "It's getting thicker, but I'll be damned if I know what's being stirred into it. Know who was in that plane? Some N.C.O. and Aasie Gowen!"

Mixon grunted. Rehm said, "And who is Aasie Gowen?"

A sudden thought hit McQueen. Grabbing the smaller man by the shoulders, he swung him toward the window.

"Did you say somebody brought you Frayne's order to come over here? Put your eye at that crack and tell me if it's the same man! Quick!"

Rehm looked out just as they heard voices downstairs. He turned from the window at once. "That's the man."

"What kind of an order did he have? Who did he say he was?"

"He didn't say. He simply said Colonel Frayne had sent for us. There was something Frayne wanted us to see, immediately."

Feet pounded on the stairs. The bar on the door scraped and the door flew open. Waxman and Mikulak came in, gun in hand. Waxman jerked his head at Rehm.

"Downstairs, Professor. Somebody wants to talk to you."

Rehm said petulantly, "Oh Lord! Again?"

"This will be the last time," Waxman promised him, grinning. "The *kaiintah* is here now. He will see that he doesn't have to call you down again. You may not come back, but certainly you will not have to go down again."

"That," McQueen thought, "is something, at least. So this fat non-com is the skipper, is he?"

Rehm shuffled out. They heard him go down the stairs. Waxman turned back to them. He said, "We will tie these other two, Mikulak. Then we can make whatever disposition is ordered of them, later."

He held the gun on them while Mikulak took some lengths of quarter-inch line off a nail. This cage seemed to be well equipped. Mikulak lashed Mixon's wrists together behind him, then deftly kicked the back of the big man's knees, dropping him to the floor.

McQueen jerked forward, involuntarily. Waxman said no word but the look in his eyes was enough. There was no doubt at all but that he would shoot, and probably dead center. McQueen subsided.

MIKULAK roped Mixon's ankles, then ran a length of the rope between them and up to his wrists. He came over to McQueen who deprived him of the pleasure of kicking by sitting down first. Mikulak repeated the operation on McQueen's wrists and ankles, then, as a finishing touch, tied the two of them to ring-bolts in the wall, fifteen feet apart.

He and Waxman went back downstairs, dropping the bar behind them. Mixon muttered, angrily.

"Damn you to hell, McQueen! Every time I get mixed up with you, sooner or later I find myself tied up like a sore-footed sled-dog. Whadda we do now?"

"You try and bust those ropes, like you did the last time," McQueen advised. "Me, I want to listen to what goes on downstairs."

Twisting his body around until he was parallel to the wall, he could get one ear flat against the floor. Sound came up through the planking as plainly as if he were in the downstairs room.

The first voice electrified him. He heard it say, in flat, heavy tones, "The time for fooling is over, Rehm. We want that Geiger instrument—that counter—and we will have it now."

McQueen had never seen the soldier who had brought Aasie. But that voice he had heard before. It took him only a second to place it. That black night at Eklutna. The man Frayne had called Goodman! Sergeant Goodman.

Rehm was saying, petulantly, "And I've told you a thousand times, I don't know what you're talking about."

Goodman answered him, impatiently, "Rehm! It is too late for childishness. I can tell you, now, why it is that we have not come down to cases before. It was known to us that you were not in sympathy with your rotten capitalistic system and we were to bring you back to Russia, as it was thought you would wish."

"Whatever you had heard, it could not have been enough to prove that I would be a traitor."

"A traitor to what? A traitor to your country's black fascist imperialism, or to the rights of man, in which you are supposed to believe?"

McQueen thought, "My god! That character sounds as if he really believes that stuff. I wonder where in hell Frayne picked him up."

He heard Rehm laugh. "The rights of man! The right to be murdered out of hand, such as you gave my colleague Emmons?"

Goodman said, "A small thing, Rehm. But it is well you remember it. Where is the instrument?"

"So far as I know, there is none. You should know. I'm sure you've searched enough."

"We have searched. It was a mistake to take you away from the camp at Iliuk until we had it in our hands. We thought, of course, that it would be easily found amongst your equipment, once you left without it. You hid it cleverly enough, Doctor. It makes the situation worse for you, now."

Rehm's voice was shaky but he spoke out plainly. "I'm sure it does. From your people's actions up to now, I suppose that torture will be next."

"No," Goodman told him easily. "I do not think so, Doctor. At least, not in the way you think. You are the martyr type, Rehm. Up to a certain point, you might enjoy your stubbornness. And you don't look strong. By the time you reached the breaking point, you might also lose the ability to tell us. No, I think we will do it otherwise. That is why I took the trouble to bring with me a lady whom you may not know. This is Mrs. Gowen, Doctor.

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A countrywoman and, in a way, a colleague of yours."

Aasie said, "Sergeant, you don't really think you can get away with this?"

"I see your imagination is working well, Mrs. Gowen. Since I have not yet told you what it is I mean to do."

The heavy voice rapped, "On the table, there, will do. Tie her down."

There were scuffling sounds and an angry exclamation from Rehm. McQueen heard someone hit him, a cracking, open-handed blow.

Then Goodman's voice again. "It will be better if you sit and observe quietly, Doctor. Until you are ready to tell us what we ask. As I told you, we have not time to work on you. I think though, that if you are true to your soft-bellied American squeamishness about your women, you will talk very quickly, now. You see, Mrs. Gowen is not a very efficient employee of your Intelligence. She has taken the risk of what is about to happen to her of her own free will. I had thought I would have trouble bringing her here, this morning, but I found that she insisted on coming."

The scuffling sounds subsided. He heard Aasie call breathlessly, "Don't tell him anything, Doctor Rehm, no matter what they do to me. I'll see him hung for it, and he knows it."

Goodman laughed, unpleasantly. "I do not think so. Frayne has no pilot who could find his way in here. And your friend, the great Colonel McQueen, is in no position to help you. In fact, he is also right now listening. Mikulak! The torch will be quickest, I think. Get it going."

CHAPTER IX

STORM SIGNALS

McQUEEN strained at the rope about his wrists. It gave less than a little. Mixon, swearing savagely to himself, was having no better luck. McQueen tugged frantically, rolling back and forth on the floor. From downstairs, he heard the faint snap of the lighted torch and the rustling sound of the flame.

Suddenly, he noticed something. A shaft of pale sunlight had been hitting the planks, a few inches from his nose. All at once, it was gone. McQueen paused and twisted to look at the window through which it had been coming.

A shadow blocked the light from two-thirds of the small opening. As McQueen watched, he saw the tip of a knife blade come through a crack and turn to pry at a shutter. One end of the board lifted. A

Sergeant Littledog

set of fingers showed at the edge, tugged, and the board came free.

A round-capped head came cautiously into sight and a pair of eyes under bushy, reddish brows surveyed the place. One glance at McQueen and Mixon on the floor and the head gave place to a pair of hands which yanked the shutter out of the way. The owner came through, feet first, and dropped silently to the floor.

McQueen saw the chest-long, red beard first, then took in the rest of the man. He was dressed in worn O.D. pants and pacs, below a ragged jacket with sergeant's stripes on the sleeves. A pistol rode one hip and a carbine was slung across his back. The knife, sheathed, hung on the other hip.

He came across the floor as soundlessly as a cat, pulling the knife to slash at McQueen's bonds while he talked. The blade looked ten inches long, and the newcomer wasted no motions with it.

He whispered, "Either o' you fellers happen to be named McQueen?"

"Check. That's me," McQueen whispered back. "You one of the Scouts?"

"Yep. S'ar'nt Littledog, sir. This other feller a friend?"

"That's right. Cut him loose. How many of you here?"

"Dunno. The colonel's comin' up the gut in a J boat. I came along the shore on this side. I figger I made better time."

A short, sharp scream knifed up through the floor. The Scout froze. "What in hell's goin' on down there?"

McQueen drove his two hundred pounds at the door, without taking time to answer. His shoulder crashed against it with a splitting crack, but the bar held. A huge hand on his shoulder spun him away.

Mixon growled, "Get outa the way!"

He hit the door lower and fifty pounds harder than McQueen. One of the supports gave, dropping the bar, and the door sagged away from the top hinge. Mixon drew back for another lunge. Feet pounded on the stairway.

Sergeant Littledog took charge. He yanked Mixon away from in front of the door with surprising power. He snapped, "Git away from in front o' it!" at both of them, and flattened himself against the door jamb beside the open edge.

Hands clawed at the broken bar and Waxman burst through, pistol out-thrust. Littledog swung in behind him in one smooth, flowing motion, his right arm under Waxman's throat yanking back his head, and the knife out in his left disappearing under Waxman's left shoulder-blade as the Russian toppled backward.

The Scout wiped the blade in two flashing movements on Waxman's shirt before the falling man hit the floor, slapped the hilt between his teeth, and whipped the carbine down.

"The next one'll likely stop on the stairs," he advised past the knife. "If there's shootin', hit the deck."

He slid sidewise through the open door, McQueen close behind. Mikulak, on his way up to join Waxman, saw them and slammed one wild shot over their heads. He ducked back down and Littledog, wasting no fire, cleared the rest of the stairway in one long bound, leaping after him onto the gallery.

McQueen, at his heels, looked out the open doorway. The rubber dinghy, carrying three men, was halfway to the amphib, already out of anything but rifle range. Mikulak was fifty yards away, running for the landing. Littledog stopped and threw one fast shot from the carbine after him. Mikulak went to his knees, skidded on the shale and toppled forward.

McQueen whirled and sprang back inside, heading for the door to the main downstairs room. Mixon, pounding down the stairs, collided with him at the foot and knocked him, stumbling, through the doorway.

THE pseudo-sergeant, "Goodman" stood in the center of the room, facing the door. The pistol in his hand was rising, already halfway up to level. McQueen, falling forward, would have had no chance to stop, had he felt like it. He drove straight at Goodman, leaving his feet in a headlong dive at the man's spread legs.

The shot roared above him and he felt a clubbing blow along half the length of his leg as his shoulder hit and Goodman staggered backward.

Twisting as he fell, McQueen saw Goodman go to one knee and the automatic—knocked out of his hand—arc, slow-motion, toward the opposite wall. McQueen scrabbled for it, reaching desperately. He got

the grip in his fist and rolled over, sitting up.

Goodman was on his feet, watching Mixon. The big man was shambling, bear-like, from the door straight for him. McQueen took one look at his eyes and stopped the yell he had his mouth open to utter. Mixon had had enough pushing around, for one day. He had the cause of it in front of him and nothing on earth could have stopped him, now.

Instead, McQueen shouted, "Morse! Get your hands up, you dummy!"

Unthinking, automatically, Mixon lifted his left arm in front of him, pawing at Goodman's face. He didn't even close the fist.

It turned out to be no sort of a fight at all. Goodman was the same type as Mixon. Or so Goodman thought. Squat and powerful, fully as heavy as the saloon keeper, he was a wrestler, too. As Mixon reached, Goodman grabbed his wrist and yanked him close, his knee driving at Morse's crotch and his arms swept wide and clutching.

McQueen had had his own occasions to worry about what happened to a man Mixon could get his hands on. Now he saw it demonstrated. The huge arms circled the Russian's elbows and contracted, once. McQueen could hear the bones crack as Goodman's grip broke and his arms fell away, numbed and useless. Mixon shifted his grip and heaved. Goodman went headfirst across the room into the wall. He twitched convulsively, once, and then lay still.

McQueen took time to look at the rest of the room. Aasie was spread-eagled on the table, moaning softly. There was a blackened hole in one knee of her dungarees, exposing a dollar-sized patch of raw, red flesh through it. Rehm was sitting in a chair facing her, his head in his hands. He did not look up.

Swearing under his breath, McQueen untied Aasie from the table and lifted her in his arms gently, carrying her toward the gallery. She raised her head as she felt his hands touch her.

She tried to smile. "Couldn't you have made it a little sooner, McQueen?"

"Sorry, I didn't know you were coming to the party. How did you happen to drop in?"

"That man. Colonel Frayne's sergeant. He told me you had flown over here with that woman. Did you?"

McQueen sighed. "An awful lot of cheap help, the colonel's got. Is that what you think he hired you for; to run a check on me?"

"I work for Colonel Frayne for fun, McQueen," she told him. "Keeping an eye on you comes under the heading of business."

Sergeant Littledog came back, refilling a carbine clip. He picked up a still flaming blow-torch from where someone had placed it on the gallery, and snapped it out without comment. But he looked from it to Aasie's knee and combed his beard reflectively.

Out in the bay, the amphib was moving, her propellers blurring in the sun. Littledog said, "Too bad we can't get at them fellers, too. I reckon we c'n account for all the rest."

"We'll get 'em," McQueen promised grimly. "If Frayne ever shows up."

"He'd oughta be here, any minute now. From where I went ashore, it ain't too far."

McQueen remembered something. He went back inside and spoke to the little man on the chair. "Rehm! Any idea where that amphibian is going? I mean, did you tell 'em anything?"

Rehm looked up. He nodded, sickly. "I told them. What else was I to do?"

"I would have done the same," McQueen admitted. "Where'll they be going after it?"

"Back to Iliuk. I told them it was there."

"Is it?"

Rehm nodded again. "It's there. But it will never do them any good. I was suspicious and I dropped it in the lake the day we were brought over here. The water will have ruined it. I don't even know that they will be able to fish out."

McQueen thought it over. "They'll try. They'll have to go back with something to show, even though they know it's busted. The brass those babies work for don't like excuses."

A NEW sound of engines, a lighter, fainter one, came from the bay. McQueen stepped out. Sergeant Littledog said, "There's the J boat, some'eres around."

"Good. I'll go down. I'm in a hurry to talk to Frayne. You want to take charge of a hunk of buzzard-gut you'll find in there on the floor? Dressed up in uniform and master sergeant's chevrons. We want to keep him reasonable healthy and I think he's beginning to stir."

"Shore, shore. Be glad to. Always enjoy takin' care of master sarjints."

The J boat rounded the bend and shoved her round nose up on the bank. The long, lean figure in the bow was first ashore. He came leaping up the bank toward McQueen.

"McQueen!" Frayne exclaimed. "Good Lord, man! I'm glad to see you are all right. Things do happen fast when you're around, don't they?"

"Damned if they don't!" McQueen agreed, ruefully. "You guys that would like to keep your Mex rank had ought to hire me out to the State Department. I'd keep you in plenty of trouble."

"We've got enough, as it is," Frayne allowed, grimly. "But . . . tell me! What've you got?"

"I've got Rehm, for one thing. His morale isn't so good, right now, but otherwise he's hale and hearty. And I've got something else. Something I'll admire to show you."

A querulous voice in rear said, "Danged if I'd ever showed ye the way t' this place if'n I'd knowed ye was goin' to organize a daggone convention!"

Jake Johnson and Jameson crawled over the J boat's bow and came up the hill. McQueen said, "Hi, Jake. Nice going. As for you, Red-eye! Have trouble getting up in the morning, at your age, do you?"

Jameson spat disgustedly. "Listen! We was already on the lake at four o'clock this mornin'. Ye c'n thank Aasie, too, that we ever come at all. Did ye happen to think o' tellin' anybody where ye was goin' last night?"

"I didn't know," McQueen apologized. "Much as I'd like to have, I couldn't find a chance to mail any postcards along the way. What's this about Aasie?"

"That's right," Frayne admitted. "We'd never have known you were missing, if it hadn't been for Mrs. Gowen. I left Mixon's place when I saw the Gorman girl go upstairs. After that, I thought you probably had your work cut out for the night. So I went to bed. On my way, I saw Mrs. Gowen home. But she took a taxi back and turned the place inside out, looking for you. I was barely asleep when she called me and said that neither you nor la Gorman was anywhere to be found."

"Suspicious, huh?" McQueen muttered. "That kind of thing could give a man a lot of trouble, in time. But . . . how did you happen to come over here?"

"A mechanic in the Northern Airways hangar told me he'd seen one of Mixon's planes take off. I had hold of Jameson, by then. He told me what you'd planned to do today, with old Johnson's help. So I figured you wouldn't have left Anchorage unless you were coming here. I thought maybe you had already talked the little brunette into changing sides. I heard you work fast."

McQueen said, "Yeah!" in unpleasant memory. "You go take a look inside that Cessna in the slip. You'll see what it took to change her mind!"

"Anyway, we took the chance. I got an-

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other ship to take us down to Naknek, right away. I left the order for the T-50 with Goodman, in case I'd guessed wrong and you would need it, after all."

"So that's how he got it."

"How who got what?"

McQueen turned toward the lodge. "Come on. I'll show you."

Inside, the squat non-com was sitting in a corner, his back against the wall. Sergeant Littledog was propped in a chair, a yard or so away, anxiously inspecting his belt knife for nicks along the edge. No other restraint seemed necessary.

Frayne said, "My God! Goodman!"

"That's right," McQueen agreed. "Where the hell did you get *him?*"

Frayne rubbed his head. "He's been in the office out there since Pearl Harbor. What're you going to do? During the war, we weren't even allowed to get rid of the ones we *knew* were commies. We were allies, maybe you remember."

"Well, now you know. Will you come back out, a moment? There's something else, right now. Littledog will take good care of him."

"Shore," the red-bearded man assured them. "I may need t' test my cuttin' edge on his ears, a little. But I'll try t' keep the rest o' him intack f'r ye, Colonel."

McQUEEN asked Rehm to come along. On their way out, he asked, "That Sergeant Littledog; who the hell is he?"

"One of the Scout platoon sergeants. Damned good man, I understand."

"You can say that again. Twice. But that name. And those whiskers."

"Oh, that. He's a local boy. One of the first volunteers for the Scouts. He was born up at Eklutna, the son of a Knik hunter and an Irish teacher at the Indian School. Don't ask me how *that* happened."

"I don't care. Matter of fact, if his pappy was anything like him, the schoolteacher probably never knew how it happened, either. But I'm glad to know he's around. He's what I'd call useful."

"You mean you'd like to borrow him, is that it? It's about time I asked. What have we got left to clean up here?"

McQueen told him about the PBY. Frayne pulled his ear. McQueen asked Rehm, "Doctor, with all the excitement, we seem to have forgotten the main item. Did you find this pitchblende mountain?"

Rehm said, "Of course not. But I have every reason to believe that it is right here."

He took in the cliffs in the rear, with one inclusive gesture. McQueen looked over at Jake Johnson, sitting on the steps watching an aid man from the J boat bandaging Aasie's knee.

"Jake," he called. "This the place? Yours and Sorenson's claim?"

The old man nodded. "Mine 'r that pirate Mixon's. Whoever gets here fust. But this's her."

"Don't worry about Morse," McQueen told him. "I'm afraid Uncle Whiskers has beat you both to it."

He turned back to Frayne. "Well, there it is. The comrades may know it, too. Are you going to let them get home with the dope?"

"The only thing we can do is radio down the Chain to watch out for them. If the radar can pick them up, a patrol plane could go out and force them down."

"*Force* them down? Suppose they won't force? And you know damned well they won't."

"That plane, you tell me, has Navy markings," Frayne said worriedly. "It's a hell of a responsibility to ask some kid to take, to go out and shoot up a Navy ship. How's he going to identify it? We can't be sure they won't lay up somewhere and change the numbers."

"That's right. There's only one pilot who can do that chore," McQueen said grimly. "You're looking at him."

"You?"

"Me. You said I was on active duty, didn't you?"

"Of course. But—"

"Look, Colonel. Those babies are down at Iliuk, right now, dragging the water offshore. They'll be there for at least an hour. And Naknek AAF's only a hundred miles away. What have they got on the line, there?"

"P-38's and 51's, I think."

"O.K. Can't you radio Naknek Operations to give me a 38 with a belly tank, armed and combat-loaded? With no questions asked?"

"I could, I suppose. But—"

"Frayne, I tell you I saw those men.

They're Red Navy pilots, as sure as I'm standing here. No matter whether the information they're carrying back, this particular trip, will be any good to them or not; if they get away with it once, they'll be over here again and again. We've got no way to stop them. But if this plane is unreported, they'll think about it before they try it again."

Undecided, the G-2 man said, "Well-l, I. . ."

McQueen was suddenly inspired. "What's your date of rank, Colonel?"

Frayne was startled. "Why, June, '44."

"I thought so. I was Air Force, remember. Mine was—is—December, '43. And Douglas signed me for CIG, the top drawer. Either way, I can hold the bag, if I'm wrong. You can say you just took an order."

The Army man grinned, at last. "Putting it that way, what have I got to lose? I'll give you the order to deliver at Naknek, yourself. I can confirm it by radio from the Scout camp when I get back there. How you going to get there?"

"I'll take the T-50, if it's all right with you. And I'll take Mrs. Gowen over to let the medics see her leg, on the same trip. You can handle all the prisoners in the J boat, can't you? By the way, you'll find three more in that Cessna, in the slip. Better not untie the littlest one. She's dynamite."

OPERATIONS at Naknek Army Air Field was a little dubious about delivering one of their best—and scarcest—airplanes to a lanky character in the wreck of a pin-striped civilian suit and a two-day beard.

The young Operations major fingered the blond wisp on his upper lip, saying, "The purpose of the flight, er—Colonel? We'll have to have something on that."

"Of course," McQueen told him cheerily. "The nurses at the Iliamna rest camp have been complainin' about the sea-gulls strafin' 'em every time they take a sunbath. I'm going over and investigate. The sea-gulls *or* the nurses."

The major glared. A clerk laid a radio flimsy at his elbow. The major glanced down and his face cleared, reluctantly.

He said, "A-1 verifies your identification, Colonel. Your rank is sufficient to take the airplane. Shall I enter 'Mission: Confidential'?"

"Just say I won't tell."

The major sighed and pushed over the paper. "Sign here, please."

McQueen sighted the amphibian an hour later and two hundred miles northwest, skirting the jagged shoreline of the Walrus Islands, below Cape Pierce. He hugged himself as best he could in the P-38's cramped cockpit. He had gambled on his guess that the comrades wouldn't risk going south to follow the Aleutian Chain, with its string of radar installations and fighter stations.

He caught the mosquito-flick of movement above the gray, white-capped water from far below him. He tipped over and dove on it, pulling up at a thousand feet. The big, lumbering patrol craft was still below him and he crossed over twice, risking fire from the top blister in order to make sure of his identification.

He made two dry runs above them, tipping his wings as he roared away in an unmistakable signal to the pilot to go in and sit. But the steep black wall of a fall storm was coming in from beyond Cape Pierce, a few miles ahead. The pilot elected to run for it.

McQueen climbed and cleared his guns with a ripping burst. As he winged over again, the storm was racing in, the vast black mass less than ten miles off. Jagged lightning flashed and an earth-shaking thunderclap shook his wings.

Time was running out for the men in the waddling plane below, reaching for haven in the storm ahead too desperately to bother with an attempt at an evasion course. It would have been less than useless, anyway. The P-38 came down on their tail as relentlessly true as a stooping hawk.

In the handful of seconds it took him to close the range, McQueen had to think of several things. Shooting sitting ducks had never appealed to him.

Regretfully, "They told me it wasn't really peace; only an extended leave of absence." And, "Dammit, I won't even be able to log this for flying pay!"

But then he remembered Aasie Gowen's knee and the dead weight of Joe Douglas' body in his arms.

With no regret at all, he touched his firing button.

"I'm tryin' to make up my mind whether or not to hang you," Shadrach rasped. "You damned cowthieves!"

SHADRACH AND SIN

By
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ILLUSTRATED BY
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THIS is no brief for Shadrach Thursday. If he exposed his immortal soul and turned into a drinking, swearing, gambling cowboy, he did so entirely on his own. He had no one to blame but himself, and neither the Utes nor the major at Fort Taylor nor the major's daughter should be held accountable.

In the spring of '80 Shadrach went north with a Barlow & Givens herd. His

uncle, Jeremiah Thursday, was the trail boss and Shadrach had just turned twenty. The day he left Elm Creek, Malachi, Shadrach's daddy, and Sarah, Shadrach's mother, counseled him.

"Now remember to do what Jeremiah says," Malachi warned. "Be in the right place at the right time around the cattle. Take care of your horses an' you'll never be afoot. Remember that wine is a mocker an' that strong drink is ragin', and that the wages of sin is death. An' son, that ol' pistol of mine shoots a little high an' to the left."

"Keep your feet dry, son," Sarah said. "There's clean socks in your bedding, an' some extra shirts. I put in a bottle of your daddy's liniment an' a jar of goose grease should you ketch cold. Say your prayers every night and be a good boy."

"I will, mama," Shadrach promised, and kissed her good-bye.

He meant to do it, too; he meant to do all the things his folks told him, but he didn't. He never went to church because he didn't get to town. He dabbled in strong drink and he sinned a-plenty. His feet got wet many's the time, a-crossing rivers; he hadn't time to change his socks, and he used his last clean shirt for bandages. But when Shadrach left home his intentions were the best.

The Barlow & Givens herd was dry cows, all in the Diamond Dot road brand. There were eighteen hundred of them and Jeremiah took them north by the old Goodnight route across the Pecos at Horsehead and north by Bosque Grande and Fort Sumner. Outside of Shadrach and his uncle, the crew was all *paisanos*. Barlow & Givens were good Christian men. On the endgate of the wagon was a sign setting down the drivers' rules:

NOTICE
You can't gamble and play cards
—and work for us.
You can't drink and get drunk
—and work for us.
You can't swear and use profane language
—and work for us.
Henry Barlow
Oscar Givens

Beyond Fort Sumner they left the Pecos and struck out northwest and two weeks' driving brought them to Fort Taylor and the Ute reservation. It was there Henry Barlow met them, loaded with bad news. The cattle market was uncertain, Colorado had quarantined against Texas cattle, and the Indian contract on the Fort Taylor reservation had been let.

"We'll have to hold 'em till after frost," Henry Barlow said, "an' maybe beyond that time. Maybe until next year."

So they took the cattle west, looking for grass to hold 'em on, and when they reached Carbina Mesa they found what they wanted. They camped the wagon on Carbina Creek and spread the cattle out.

IT TAKES more men to drive cattle than it does to hold them. Jeremiah Thursday let part of his crew go back to Texas. He kept Shadrach, Emilio Santisteven, Mateo Vigil, and Carlos Candelaria. They went from July till September without seeing anybody except a few stray riders, and the only news they had was when Jeremiah took the wagon and drove the thirty miles to Fort Taylor for supplies. In early September Henry Barlow came again and this time he had better tidings.

"The man that had the contract at Fort Taylor had to forfeit," Barlow said. "I've brought the agent out with me and if he likes the cows he'll buy 'em. I want to make a gather on the cattle so he can look 'em over."

Right then the agent joined Barlow and the two Thursday men. He was a tall, bearded man and, Shadrach thought, he had a slippery eye. His name was Baudelair and when he shook hands a man was reminded of a dead fish.

"I've been reading the rules you have posted on your wagon, Mr. Barlow," Baudelair said. "I'm pleased to see that you are a good Christian man. In my own small way I try to do my part working among the heathen Utes, but I fear my efforts are wasted."

"Well," Barlow said, "it prevents trouble, a thing like that does. I've noticed that most trouble comes from gamblin' or whiskey or women. We'll have the cattle together for you to look at shortly, Mr. Baudelair. The boys will start to gather 'em right away."

All the cattle were on the mesa, spread out along Carbina Creek, so they didn't take too long to gather. Baudelair rode through them and he and Henry Barlow made a deal. The cattle were bought at twenty-four dollars a round, to be delivered two hundred head at a time, and payment made on delivery. Jeremiah Thursday was Barlow's agent to deliver. Barlow and Baudelair pulled out, headed back to the agency with word left that deliveries were to start November first.

A week after they left, Jeremiah's horse fell with him, stove in his ribs and broke his leg so that the bone pushed through. He was unconscious when Shadrach found him.

There was just one place for Jeremiah Thursday to go and that was the hospital at Fort Taylor. The wagon was unloaded and Shadrach took his uncle in. He made the thirty miles over no road at all in eleven hours, and the wagon mules were

bushed when they arrived. The contract surgeon at the Fort set the broken leg, taped the broken ribs and gave Jeremiah laudanum to kill the pain; then Shadrach called on Major Paul Atterwood, the commanding officer, about his uncle.

The major's daughter, Ellen, opened the door for Shadrach. It was just breakfast time and he could smell the Army bacon frying. Shadrach stated his mission and the gray-eyed girl called her father.

"A Barlow & Givens man?" Major Atterwood said after Shadrach had explained. "All right, he can stay in the hospital, but you'll have to pay the surgeon." He saw the pinched look on Shadrach's face and invited him in. "Breakfast is ready," he said, "and you've had a hard drive." The major had been a long time in the West, ever since '65, and he knew the score. So Shadrach had breakfast with the Atterwoods, Mrs. Atterwood fussing over him and asking questions, the major silent and watchful behind his gray whiskers, and Ellen's gray eyes watching him.

Shadrach ate the bacon and hot biscuits and drank the coffee while he answered the questions. He told about the ranch down on the Brazos the three hundred cattle wearing his brand, his horses, and his ambitions.

"The folks wanted me to be a minister," he said, "but someway I don't feel a call to preach. If I can, I'd like to come over into New Mexico Territory and set up a ranch. That's one reason I come with Uncle Jerry—to look over the country. Texas is gettin' crowded."

After breakfast Shadrach sent a message through the fort's telegraph office, trying to catch Henry Barlow at Dodge City, then he took his mules and drove to town. The town was five miles from the fort, off the military reservation and between the fort and the agency which was fifteen miles south. There were saloons, stores, a blacksmith shop and eating house, and a wagon yard. Shadrach cared for his weary mules and curled up in the wagon and slept. In the evening he went to see Jeremiah, who was resting good except for his leg, and that night Shadrach slept in the wagon yard again.

Next day he had an answer to his telegram. Henry Barlow wired that Shadrach was to stay with the cattle and deliver them; named Shadrach as his agent, and said that Barlow & Givens would take care of all expenses. Shadrach talked to Jeremiah, showed the surgeon the telegram, and pulled out for Carbina Mesa. The weight of the whole world was on his shoulders.

Back at camp he found things in good order. Emilio and Mateo and Carlos accepted his authority without question. They were *vaqueros,* good hands with cattle when they had a boss, and Shadrach was the boss. Everybody knew what was to be done and everybody did it, so things went along just as well as when Jeremiah had been there. Shadrach did his own riding and split up his uncle's rides between himself and the others.

A WEEK after the accident, he went to the fort to see how Jeremiah was making it, and Ellen Atterwood just happened to visit the hospital while Shadrach was there. As a result Shadrach again ate with the Atterwoods.

"The surgeon says that Uncle Jerry will be laid up for three months," he reported over the dinner table. "Maybe longer. Major, that Carbina Mesa country don't belong to anybody, does it?"

The major shook his head and Shadrach said, "Well then, I think we'll build a soddy by the creek. That country is about what I had in mind to run cattle." He re-loaded his plate with venison and potatoes, and went on eating. "An' I'm surely grateful for Miss Ellen goin' down to see Uncle Jerry like she does," he said. "It keeps him from frettin'."

Ellen blushed and Major Atterwood looked at his wife.

All the officers at Fort Taylor were married men and had their wives with them. There weren't any young men to squire Ellen Atterwood around. Maybe that was why Ellen always visited the hospital when Shadrach came in to see his uncle. It's a dead sure thing that Ellen was one of the reasons Shadrach made weekly visits. He liked his uncle Jerry fine but he was hardly fond enough of him to ride sixty miles once a week like he did. True enough, he always went to the hospital first, but after he'd made his inquiries and answered Jeremiah's questions, he didn't stay. Generally he could be found

in the Atterwood parlor. It was real noticeable and Major and Mrs. Atterwood talked it over.

"He's a nice boy, Paul," Mrs. Atterwood said. "Well-mannered and quiet, and he has good prospects. Cattle of his own, and horses, too. I don't see anything wrong with him coming to see Ellen. She needs young company."

The major stroked his gray whiskers. He had been Army all his life and expected his family to stay Army. "Mmmm," he said. "Well, maybe, Ruth. Just the same I wish he didn't come so often. And you don't have to invite him to stay every time he comes."

Mrs. Atterwood didn't answer. The major commanded Fort Taylor but Mrs. Atterwood was in charge at home. She tossed her head and made up her mind, and the next Saturday when Shadrach was due for his weekly visit she cooked an extra special dinner. But Shadrach didn't make his appearance. Shadrach had his troubles.

The wild plums were ripe in the thickets along Carbina Creek and Shadrach, coming in from his ride, anticipating his trip next day to Fort Taylor, found Emilio and Mateo and Carlos in camp, all excited and upset. Shadrach learned that all in camp might well expect to be scalped and must fight for their lives; the scalpers, in fact, were right down the creek a quarter of a mile. He left Emilio and Mateo and Carlos preparing to die a-fighting, and giving his daddy's old gun-belt a hitch, rode down to see the cause of the excitement.

Sure enough, a quarter below camp, Shadrach came upon four tepees set on a flat. When he rode in, a greasy-faced Ute, hair braided down his back and an old Springfield across his arm, came out to greet him. The Ute said, "How?" Shadrach said, *"Como esta, amigo?"* and they shook hands.

The Ute brightened when he heard Shadrach's Spanish. He took Shadrach to a tepee and six other men filtered in. They sat down, smoked a pipe around the circle, and talked. Shadrach learned that the man who had greeted him was Oso Grande, Big Bear, and that the Utes had come to gather plums. He saw little, thin-legged, thin-armed, pot-bellied children peeping through the door. He saw the squalor and poverty that surrounded him, and he didn't believe there was much danger of losing his scalp.

Indians were no particular news to Shadrach. He'd seen them when he was a youngster, Tonkawas and Comanches and a few Kiowa-Apaches. He had heard about them from Malachi and Jeremiah and he knew the breed. He didn't like them nor did he particularly dislike them. They were an evil to be accepted, like rain with no slicker handy, and when Shadrach rode back to camp he had his mind made up and his plans laid. He soothed Emilio, Mateo and Carlos, and told them what was what.

An Indian, a wild Indian anyhow, would take anything that wasn't nailed down, so one man must be left at camp while the Utes were around. Emilio was told off for that duty. As for the rest, Shadrach figured that if he gave them beef he would save a lot more, so he sent Mateo and Carlos out to run in a stray Y Bar heifer that had been accidentally picked up on the drive. When they were gone, Shadrach and Emilio boiled up ten gallons of coffee, dumped a can of molasses in it and waited for visitors.

Sure enough they came. Oso Grande and his whole outfit trailed into camp. Shadrach gave them the coffee and while they were drinking it Mateo and Carlos arrived with the heifer. It was a regular love feast, and all Shadrach could do to keep Oso Grande from hugging him. He established amicable relations right then.

Next day, riding through the Ute camp, he saw where he'd made a mistake. The Utes had cleaned up the heifer. There wasn't enough meat left to feed the hungry dogs. Shadrach decided that he would have to ration out provisions, a quarter of a beef at a time, and revised his plans accordingly. That evening, when Oso Grande showed up, leading a slab-sided pinto mare, Shadrach passed out the hind quarter of a cow he'd killed. Oso Grande took the hind quarter and gave Shadrach the mare.

THE UTES stayed a week. They gathered wild plums and hunted game all over the mesa. They visited Shadrach, he visited them and had a hard time to keep from getting lousy. He doled out the rest

of the cow, a quarter at a time, and he learned a lot about Indians. At the end of the week the Utes left and all that remained of their visit was the pinto mare, Oso Grande's present.

That mare was a sore spot. When an Indian gives a present he expects one in return. Shadrach had passed out beef and figured that was present enough; but that wasn't the way Oso Grande figured. He hinted and hinted and finally came out bluntly and Shadrach had to turn over five cartridges, a butcher knife and an old hat before he got shut of the Ute. The mare was a sore spot in another way. Every gelding in the *remuda,* and they were all geldings, fell in love with her and followed her around, and Shadrach had to hobble and sideline her to keep his horses from being lured off to join the Indian ponies. He was glad when the Utes were gone.

The Utes had come about October twentieth and after their departure Shadrach had only a few days to gather cattle and drive to the agency. It took the crew a day to put two hundred cows together and when they were bunched, Shadrach received a surprise. Baudelair, with five men, showed up at the camp on Carbina Creek and announced that he would take delivery right there. It was welcome news. It saved Shadrach a two days' drive and having to leave his camp deserted. He began to revise his first opinion of the agent.

When Baudelair accepted the cattle and passed over a draft for four thousand, eight hundred dollars, Shadrach decided the agent was a fine man. Baudelair and his outfit stayed overnight and took their turns in riding guard on the herd. In the morning Shadrach and his boys helped them start the cattle and then went back to camp.

The beef issue at the agency was to be November fifth and Shadrach thought he would go to see it. If Oso Grande's starved band was any sample of the agency Utes there would be wild doings when those big Diamond Dot cows were turned over to them. And too, Shadrach hadn't seen Ellen Atterwood for some time. He got things in shape so that he could leave, and a week after Baudelair's departure with the cattle, Shadrach Thursday stuck his leg across his Maricopa horse and set out for the east. He started at four in the morning and at eight he was in Fort Taylor, visiting Jeremiah at the hospital and looking around impatiently for Ellen.

Jeremiah was feeling a great deal better. His ribs were healed but he was still in bed with a weight pulling on his broken leg. He asked Shadrach about the cattle and he handed out some information. Cattle prices had gone up, Uncle Jerry said. He'd heard from Henry Barlow that prices were on the rise. It was a shame they'd sold those big dry cows so cheap, but it couldn't be helped.

Shadrach agreed and leaving his uncle, rode over to the major's house where Mrs. Atterwood told him that Ellen and her father had gone to the agency to see the beef issue. Shadrach rode down to the town and hired a fresh horse from the wagon yard. He didn't want Maricopa played out by thirty more miles on top of those he had already covered. The wagon yard horse was a plug, so it was noon before Shadrach reached the agency.

At the agency Shadrach found as wild a scene as he had ever witnessed. South of the buildings was a big corral with a chute leading out of it, and a plank platform and table over the chute. A clerk on the platform would call a name and from the circle of Indians in front of the chute, one would come forward. After some talk between clerk and Ute, cowboys prodded cattle into the chute and when they were turned out, there came a race. The men and boys of that particular Indian's family took after the cows a-horseback and killed them on the run. The women came a-piling to butcher. It was as near as the Indians could come to having a buffalo run and they were sure enjoying themselves.

Shadrach, forgetting for the moment that he wanted to see Ellen, got as close to the chute as he could. He saw the cattle, noted the brands on them, and his eyes widened in astonishment. They weren't his cows. These were poor scrawny things, their ribs showing, so weak that they could hardly run. There were oxen in the bunch, old work stock, lean and stringy; there were cull cattle of every kind and color from dogied calves on up. And every one of them was marked with the Diamond Dot road brand, so freshly

burned that scabs had hardly formed. Shadrach quit the chute and rode across the flat to where Major Atterwood, with another officer, Ellen, and Baudelair, sat their horses, watching proceedings. Hauling his mount to a halt, Shadrach opened his mouth to speak but didn't get a word out. The major jumped him.

"I'm glad you came, Thursday," the majors said, "although I'm surprised at your effrontery, young man. I've been telling your partner what I thought of this and I want you to hear what I have to say. I've been in the service for a good many years and never in that time have I seen such a bald-faced theft. I saw the cattle you drove past the fort and it seemed to me that for once the Indians would get good beef. I believed they would receive what they're entitled to. Now this happens. You substitute these poor cattle. I'm an Army officer and I can't control the Department of the Interior, but I have a few friends in Washington. Believe me, they will hear of this!"

Shadrach's mouth was still open. Major Atterwood and the other officer were glaring at him; Ellen's face was turned away.

"Ellen," Shadrach said.

"Don't speak to my daughter!" the major snapped. "Ellen wants nothing to do with you." He swung his horse between Shadrach and the girl.

For just a moment Shadrach sat there, then moved his horse. Before he had gone fifty feet Baudelair was beside him.

"Get off the reservation," the agent ordered. "If you don't I'll have the police run you off. Nobody can come on the reservation without my permission."

Shadrach looked at Baudelair. The agent's face was red and his eyes were slitted. "You damned cheat!" Shadrach said. "Them cattle ain't the ones I turned over to you."

"Prove it!" Baudelair snapped. "Every one is branded Diamond Dot and I have five men who will swear those are the cattle you delivered."

"You'll get no more," Shadrach vowed.

"I'll get every cow I have contracted," Baudelair said. "Every one of them."

He trotted his horse toward the agency buildings and Shadrach followed with his eyes. He wanted to pull Malachi's old gun and empty it into the agent's back; he wanted to do that so bad he could taste it, but he didn't. Mad and sick and sore, he kept his wagon yard horse to a jog trot.

BY THE time he was off the agency and riding into town Shadrach had cooled down and figured out just what had happened. He knew, as well as if he had been there, what Baudelair had done. Cattle prices were up. The agent had taken those good dry cows of Shadrach's for himself and picked up the junk cattle to take their place. That was what had happened, but proving it would be a different matter. The issue cattle were all branded Diamond Dot, there were perjured witnesses and it would take months to get an inspector out from Washington. Shadrach shook his head. He wanted to talk with Jeremiah but he didn't. The Thursdays killed their own snakes and this was Shadrach's snake.

After he had put his horse in the wagon yard he squatted down to think. The afternoon wore along and it began to get dark. Shadrach was tired and cold and hungry. He went to the eating house and got a meal, roast pork, plenty of potatoes, bread and coffee. Shadrach didn't know it but that meal was a fine foundation for what came afterward. When he left the eating house he saw a man ride up in front of a saloon, leave his horse and go in. Shadrach knew the rider. He was Parker, one of the five who had received cattle with Baudelair. Shadrach followed him.

Shadrach had never been in a saloon before. If he had not been so intent on Parker he might have seen some interesting things. As it was, he saw Parker at the bar and Parker saw him. Shadrach walked up and Parker said, "Hello, Thursday. Come down to see your cows issued?"

Shadrach lied. "No," he said deliberately, "I came down to see my uncle in the hospital. Did they issue beef today?" He was all innocence.

"Guess so." Parker relaxed. "I just got in. Have a drink?"

Parker's words told Shadrach something he needed to know, but not enough. An idea popped into his head. "Sure," Shadrach said.

"Give the boy a little whiskey," Parker ordered.

The drink burned all the way down Shadrach's throat and like to choked him, but arriving like it did amongst the pork and potatoes, it did small damage.

Shadrach had one ten dollar gold piece left after paying horse hire and for his meal. "I'll buy a drink," he said, and put the gold piece on the bar. If he could get Parker drunk and talking . . .

By the time the ten dollars had shrunk to five Shadrach saw that he needed more ammunition for his scheme. The pork and potatoes were working for him against Parker's empty belly, but experience was on Parker's side.

Between the drinks Parker had played a little monte. With his five dollars in his hand Shadrach went back to the monte table. He knew no more about the game than he knew about herding elephants but he put his five dollars down, bold as brass. He had the *alce,* although he didn't know it, and the *alce* came. The dealer paid the bet and Shadrach went back to the bar.

"Hell," he said to Parker, "that's easy money. Have another drink?"

A gambling, lying, drinking cowboy, Shadrach Thursday. He knew better; he had been raised better.

About midnight Shadrach reeled out of the saloon. Determination and a full belly had won out over experience. In the saloon Parker was passed out, but before that he had talked and bragged about how smart a man Baudelair was, and how there were two hundred head of cattle being held on the north fork of Carbina Creek. The information was stamped indelibly in Shadrach's mind.

Outside the saloon he was sick. When he had emptied he wove a way to the wagon yard and roused the hostler. The hostler didn't want to saddle Maricopa, but he did, and helped Shadrach to mount. Maricopa was a gentle horse, cowpuncher gentle anyhow, and he started west, Shadrach clinging to the saddle horn.

The men were up and eating when Shadrach got to camp. They pulled him off Maricopa and put him on his bed, shaking their heads at his condition. *"Muy borracho . . .* very drunk," they said, and shook their heads again.

Shadrach wasn't drunk—not really—but he had the greatgrandfather of all hangovers. He didn't bother to deny the implication. He lay there and groaned every time a man moved. A spoken word was loud as cannon fire. Shadrach, the gambling, drinking, swearing cowboy, was plumb sick.

It was Emilio, the oldest, who conceived the idea of putting the boss in the creek. Shadrach was undressed and dunked. The icy water was a thousand needles but the coffee that followed stayed down and Shadrach began to believe that he might live. He held his hands against his head and talked, and the others listened.

"Cabrón," Emilio said feelingly.

"Pelado!" growled Mateo, and made fierce gestures as though using a knife.

"Hijo de mula," Carlos rasped.

They went away then and let Shadrach sleep.

HE SLEPT through the day, rousing at supper time to eat a little. He slept the night through. In the morning he was recovered. Before noon the Diamond Dot men left their camp, driving loose horses, a pack on the slab-sided pinto mare. They went north. Carbina Creek had only two forks and the Diamond Dot camp was on the south branch.

About five o'clock Shadrach, on the north fork of Carbina, discovered a little bunch of cows. Riding through them he saw they had not been rebranded. They wore only the original ranch mark and the Diamond Dot road brand. Elated, Shadrach collected his men.

At six o'clock, with Mateo, Carlos, and Emilio, Shadrach was ensconced among pines on a hill above the creek. Below him was a soddy containing three men. As they watched, a fourth man came riding in and Shadrach recognized Parker. Parker turned his horse loose and went into the soddy, and Shadrach discussed his wishes with his companions.

They withdrew into the pines and an argument raged. Emilio thought the thing to do was strike at night, and was seconded by Mateo. Shadrach shook his head. Morning was the time, he said. They ate cold food and huddled in their saddle blankets.

Before sunrise each man of them took

station by the soddy. They were in place when the door opened and a frowsy-headed man emerged carrying a bucket. Emilio roped that man around the neck and jerked him down. The clatter of the bucket and a frightened squawk brought others tumbling from the soddy. Bleary-eyed and sleepy, they made no fight of it. They saw the gun in Shadrach's hand; they saw Carlos' old *escopeta,* the bell muzzle weaving little circles; they saw Mateo's knife and their hands went up.

"What's the idea, Thursday?" Parker rasped. "What are you tryin' to do?"

"I'm tryin' to make up my mind whether or not to hang you," Shadrach rasped. "You damned cowthieves!"

Emilio pulled a knot tight on Parker's wrists.

"Cowthieves?" Parker's eyes were wide. "We ain't stole no cattle. These are Baudelair's."

"They're Diamond Dots. Baudelair's got no cattle."

Mateo, strolling over now that the last man was tied, touched Parker's throat with the gleaming point of his *saca tripas,* his "gits the guts" knife. *"Cerra la boca!"* he snapped. Parker shut up.

Now, with a fire built, Shadrach and his men warmed their bones and cooked and filled their empty bellies, while their captives, tied hand and foot, shivered with their backs against the soddy's wall. The soddy itself was searched and Emilio and Mateo were armed with the rifles they found. Carlos disdained a new gun but stuck to his *escopeta.* Arms not taken were dumped into the creek and then, leaving Mateo for a guard, the Diamond Dots saddled fresh horses and began their roundup.

It was mid-afternoon before the gathering was finished and a count made. Shadrach rode over to the prisoners.

"I'm goin' to leave you here," he said. "After awhile you'll get untied. When you do, pull out! You'll be afoot because we've got your horses. Start walkin' an' keep on walkin'. The only reason I'll let you go at all is because you're just hired men. But if I ever see one of you again . . ." He left the threat unfinished.

"More better that we keel them now," Mateo observed, using his scanty English for the benefit of all. *"Muertos no hablan."*

Shadrach shook his head and bidding Mateo to follow, rode toward the cattle. Mateo looked back regretfully. Mateo was half Cherokee and Mateo was right. Dead men do not talk nor cause other damage. Mateo did not want to go.

With the loose horses thrown into the herd, the Diamond Dots started their cattle. They were barely out of sight before Parker, wriggling in his bonds, rolled close to one of his companions. "Get busy on my hands," Parker growled.

Steers or dry cows can be driven surprising distances. Shadrach pushed his cattle along, driving until it was almost too dark to see. Then, not wishing to spill them, he stopped and bedded the herd, setting a two-man guard around it. Mateo, riding first guard, looked back toward the west and regretted lost opportunity. And again Mateo was right. Back at the soddy every man was untied, and a horse overlooked by the Diamond Dots, had come in to water.

In the morning Shadrach and his men moved on. They were following the fork of Carbina Creek and before ten o'clock had reached the main stream. At noon, without noting it, they passed a boundary marker and were on the military reservation. At two o'clock, rising in his stirrups, Mateo thrust an arm toward the south.

"Mira," he shouted.

Shadrach looked. A compact group of men had crowned a rise and were riding toward the cattle. Shadrach lifted Malachi's old gun, loosening it in the holster, and rode out to meet them. Mateo and Emilio, rounding the herd to follow the boss, checked the forward movement of the cattle, while Carlos cut off from where he rode and pounded after Shadrach.

Well out from the herd the two groups came together and stopped. Baudelair rode at the head of his men, Parker flanking him. There were four others Shadrach did not know, bewhiskered, hard-faced men, and one of these wore a star on his coat. So intent was each party on the other that they failed to note three men come over the rise to the east and swing toward them.

"There he is, Sheriff!" Baudelair snapped. "Arrest him!"

"You're Shadrach Thursday?" the star-wearer began. "I'm a deputy sheriff an' I've got a warrant for your arrest."

Shadrach grinned thinly, not heeding the sheriff but keeping his eyes on Baudelair.

"Think you're damned cute, don't you?" Baudelair answered that taunting grin. "Parker got loose an' came for me. I'll reclaim my cattle."

"Try to take 'em," Shadrach grated, and Malachi's old gun was in his hand.

WHAT might have happened remains a problem. What did happen was that a hoarse voice, trained to command, rasped "Halt!" and a blue-clad man drove his horse between Shadrach and Baudelair. High-headed and imperious, Major Atterwood sat his restive mount and behind the major two tanned troopers held their carbines at ready. Shadrach slid the gun back into its holster and the major, staring at Baudelair, rasped a question.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"That man," Baudelair pointed at Shadrach, "has stolen two hundred head of cattle from me, tied up the men I had herding them, and drove them off. I've brought an officer to arrest him and reclaim my cattle."

Major Atterwood's eyes glinted. "You are on a military reservation," he stated. "Civil officers have no authority here. I'll handle this." He turned to Shadrach.

Shadrach was ready. "I didn't steal a cow," he declared, and met the major's eyes. "Every one of those cows is a Diamond Dot."

"It seems that you and your partner have fallen out." Scorn curled the major's lips beneath his beard.

"Don't call him my pardner!" Shadrach's voice went up a half tone, then leveled. "Those are my cows."

"They're my cattle!" Baudelair pushed his horse forward a step. "I demand—"

"You'll demand nothing. You're on a military reservation with an armed party and without permission. You say those are your cattle, Thursday? Prove it."

"Every one of those cows are in the Diamond Dot brand," Shadrach said steadily. "It ain't been vented. I'm the Diamond Dot representative. You saw the telegram givin' me authority. I delivered two hundred head of Diamond Dots to the agent an' he issued them to the Indians. You saw that, too, an' if I remember, you weren't too well pleased with 'em. I've got the agent's receipt an' a draft for the two hundred cows I delivered. Any other Diamond Dots in this country have got to be mine."

Puzzlement corrupted the sternness of the major's face. "But what are you doing with them here?" he demanded.

Shadrach grinned, for he knew his battle was won. "Takin' 'em down to give to Oso Grande," he answered promptly.

"Oso Grande?"

"Sure. He camped down below me awhile back and gave me a pinto mare. That's her with the horses. When an Indian gives you a present you've got to give him one."

Behind Shadrach, leather creaked. Emilio growled something and Mateo answered swiftly. Of those three men, Mateo alone spoke English. He was interpreting. Emilio and Carlos laughed.

Mixed emotions struggled for mastery on Major Atterwood's face. He wanted to grin but restrained it. On a military post the commanding officer is all the law and must maintain his dignity.

"I'm going to look at those cattle," the major declared. "You will come with me, Thursday. And if the brands are as you say, and if this means what I think it does, there will be some new occupants in the stockade. Sergeant, hold these men here!"

Now once again this is no brief for Shadrach Thursday. The whole thing was entirely his fault. It was his fault that Baudelair and Parker went to the Fort Taylor guardhouse, charged with leading an armed party on a military reservation. His fault, too, that after an investigation, Baudelair was tried for fraud and sent to jail. And Shadrach was forced to explain to Henry Barlow why, with half a troop of cavalry for escort, he delivered two hundred head of Diamond Dot cows as a present to Oso Grande and the Utes. Certainly the whole business lay at Shadrach's door. He had turned into a lying, swearing, drinking, gambling cowboy, and at one time was ready to kill a man. He alone was to blame. But in extenuation, this statement should be made: Shadrach Thursday ran a good outfit when he established his ranch on Carbina Mesa, and Ellen Atterwood never did complain about him as a husband.

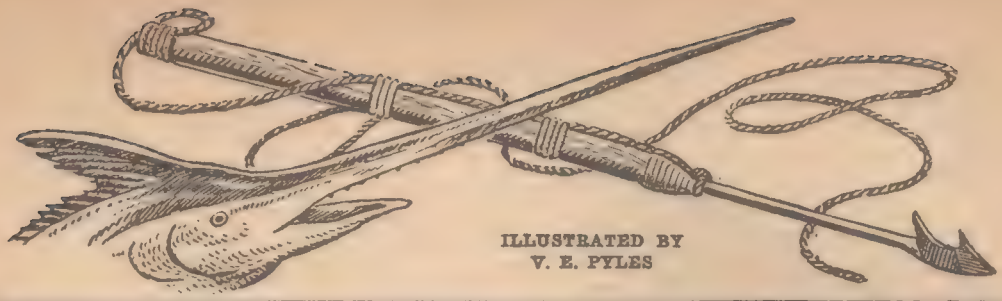
BLUE FURY

By
JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

OFF to port, like a mirage through the sheen of haze, Catalina Island lay basking in the white sunlight. The salt breeze blowing over her mountainous shoulders was humid with land heat. And the swells from her cliffs, glassy and rounded when they reached us, slapped lightly against our hull, lifting and rolling the boat gently as she seethed through them. Beyond the heavy plank extending the length of four men from our bow, the dazzling sea was broken by two sail-like fins slicing the swells.

Peter Pierce, our new harpooner, crouched in the railed pulpit at the end of the rising and falling plank, his body a slender and supple silhouette against the blinding sun-glare. The kid still held the harpoon horizontal, its arrow-shaped dart pointing at the swordfish to direct Mark King. The pulse in my throat throbbed painfully as I waited, but it wasn't the usual pressure of suspense I felt when closing water on a broadbill and knowing that in seconds all hell might break loose. I was thinking of the kid

Pierce waited until the last possible moment before raising and plunging the shaft.



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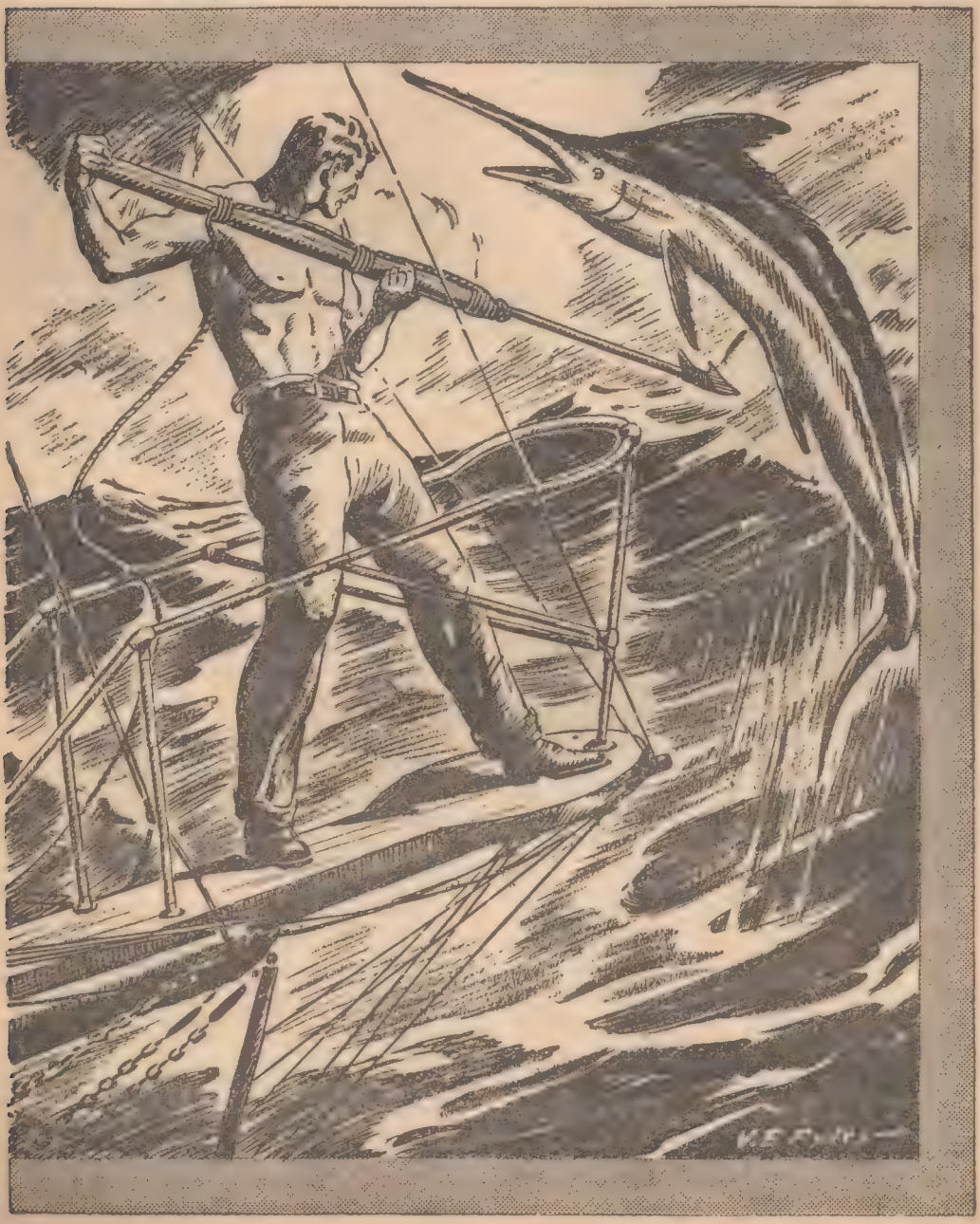
V. E. PYLES



rather than the swordfish, and praying he wouldn't do something to call forth another outburst from King.

The skipper's harsh attitude toward Pierce puzzled me. I glanced back now, trying to judge his mood. King's heavy body swayed on wide-braced legs as he stood at the topside controls over the engine cabin. His absorbed expression told me nothing, but his eyes, narrowed and strangely alive as he watched the kid, made me uneasy. I wondered if he were looking for something else to criticize.

It was now three years since a parted headstay had dropped the plank, breaking King's arm and leaving it so stiff he couldn't use a harpoon with any comfort. In that time he'd tried perhaps twenty harpooners, and though none met his exacting requirements, he'd been amazingly patient with their mistakes. Only with Pierce was King short-tempered, caustic, bitingly critical. And what was surprising about that was that of all the men he'd tried, the kid showed the greatest promise. Why King couldn't see that, I couldn't understand.

WE FIRST saw Pierce at the little Newport Beach pier where we moored the boat. He was slim and deeply browned, as ungainly as a pup and just as friendly. Though barely voting age, he'd spent two years in the South Pacific with the Army and when not fighting Japs he'd learned to spear fish, wearing an oval Nip vision mask. He said he'd gotten good at goggle fishing and thought he might make a harpooner. Amused at that, King told him they were two different things; and advised him to find a lookout's position on another swordfishing boat.

The kid grinned and shook his head. "When I sail on a plank-boat, I want to sail on the best, the *Swordfishing King III.*"

King's gray brows lifted. "But my boat's no longer the high one!"

"Fishermen told me," said the kid, "that each of your boats, the *Swordfishing King I, II* and *III* was high boat in turn. They said you were the greatest harpooner of all until your accident—that you'd been known as 'King of the Swordfishermen'."

King flushed but looked pleased. "Just a play on my name."

"That's not what I heard," said the kid seriously.

King deliberated. "Andy here—Tom Andrews"—and the skipper nodded at me—"has been my lookout for years, and I'm my own boat operator. And the remaining place in the crew is filled; I'm trying out a new harpooner."

"You've tried out a good many in the past three years," said the kid eagerly. "That's why I figure maybe I'll stand a chance."

King laughed, and we left with our gear.

When we sailed from Newport Beach in the morning, the kid was at the pier with some cork floats and a harpoon. He tried to harpoon the floats, but he wasn't very good. As we drew away from our mooring, he was out in a borrowed skiff, collecting the floats. He was still working at it when we sailed down the channel at dusk.

Well, the kid was there practicing the next morning, and still at it that evening. I thought he'd grow tired of it, but I was wrong. Weeks went by, then a month, and the kid was still spearing floats, sometimes from the pier, sometimes from a skiff. The other fishermen became interested after he began to hit the floats nine times out of ten, and he was offered places on different boats. But he refused, determined to serve with King. I began to like Pierce. I liked his infectious grin, his dogged persistence. More than that, I noticed he had something a harpooner should be born with: a quick eye and coordination.

I mentioned this to King, but he only laughed and said, "You're a soft-hearted old rooster, Andy."

The new harpooner couldn't take enough swordfish to satisfy King, so he tried another, who proved no better. And so two months passed.

The night King told the latest harpooner he wouldn't do, we sat on the after-hatch trying to think who to try next. King was discouraged, and said maybe he'd give up swordfishing. He was nearing seventy and didn't need the money. The little pier brought good rentals for mooring privileges, and he owned several small buildings, with fishermen's supplies stores downstairs and apartments above, that brought in a comfortable income. A bachelor, with no near

relatives, he could retire and have an easy life.

"You could also sell your boat for around seven thousand these days," I added.

King bristled. "I'd sink her before I'd sell her to an indifferent fisherman! Maybe I'm sentimental, Andy, but the *Swordfishing King* is my baby. She bears my name and I believe she stands for something among Southern California swordfishermen."

The kid had cast ten floats into the channel and after harpooning them without a miss, he grinned at us. King began to watch.

Pierce set the floats adrift again, speared them in ten throws, and once more kicked them from the pier.

"Let me try it," said King.

Now in harpooning swordfish, you try to place the boat's plank above the fish and drive the shaft down. You don't hurl your shaft unless a swordfish swerves. So what the kid was doing wasn't exactly in the skipper's line, and King's arm was stiff besides. But there was a time when he could unerringly drive a dart into a swordfish fifteen feet below the surface, and he still had an accurate eye and the uncanny coordination of the born harpooner.

He threw the harpoon ten times, hitting but three floats. Ten more tries and he brought up three more floats. He handed back the harpoon, and Pierce speared the remaining floats, now well out into the channel, with four throws.

King smiled ruefully. "We're sailing at eight. Be aboard."

Pierce's grin was like sunlight on a smooth sea. From behind King, I grinned back.

I hoped the kid would show us things that first day, but he didn't. It's one thing to harpoon corks from a pier, and quite another to drive a harpoon into a weaving swordfish from a bobbing 24-foot plank. King put the pulpit right over a five-hundred pounder, and Pierce missed it by a yard. The second day was worse. The kid missed two swordfish that didn't show any tendency to be "boat-shy". King didn't say anything about these failures. He was quiet and friendly and good-natured.

Then that third day!

FROM the duck-seat high on on the mast, I spotted two fins, and after we'd drawn close, the kid went out on the plank. He look worried and anxious, and though he was a little slow driving in the dart, the copper point entered within an inch of the spine. The kid let out a wild yell as he heaved up the shaft by its line, leaving the dart, with the harpoon line secured to its center, inside the fish. By the time I'd made the harpoon line fast to the skiff, Pierce had reached the afterdeck and he helped me slide the boat over the side. We left it drifting. Within an hour and a half, the swordfish would be worn out fighting it and could be pulled up.

Often two or more swordfish are found together, so I climbed to the duck-seat projecting forward from the upper mast. Almost immediately I sighted the dorsal and caudal fins of another swordfish, less than a mile off our starboard beam. Pierce had trouble replacing the bent lily-rod with a new one, but presently he had it on the shaft and another copper dart fitted to it. A large swordfish lay dead ahead, its long, vicious snout breaking the seas as Pierce worked out to the pulpit.

Gone was the kid's nervousness. He looked as confident as a harpooner who has driven harpoons into a thousand swordfish. He didn't even look awkward now. I sensed he'd discovered whatever adjustment it was he had to make between spearing cork floats and harpooning swordfish, and with that adjustment made it was an old story. Either he was the cockiest kid who ever stood in a pulpit, or he knew in his heart that he'd found himself. Knew he was a natural. I felt a prickling along my spine at the effortless, almost casual way he raised the harpoon. Then his arm moved like a released spring. Water boiled below the plank as he jerked the shaft back.

He jumped a couple of times from sheer exuberance, putting a severe strain on the headstay supporting the plank, making the mast creak and sway.

"Great Godfrey!" King roared. "You trying to bring down the mast!"

That was the first time King spoke sharply to Pierce, but from then on the skipper was severe and critical about the way the kid handled a harpoon, when he

drove a dart into the side of a broadbill, about how he cleaned a fish on deck, and the manner in which he used the whalelance the first time he pulled up and killed a broadbill. King's blistering comments made sense, but it was not like him to be harsh.

The kid took it all in chastened spirit and tried harder. He knew he was green, and King was still his hero. He harpooned six broadbills the first two weeks and missed half as many—no better than the skipper could have done with a stiff arm. But in the kid's case you felt this was just the beginning. Even when he missed, he showed promise. There was no fumbling and no excuses.

I kept telling the skipper that Pierce was doing all right for a beginner, but he never answered. I wondered if he were still mad because the kid had yelled and hopped around after tagging his first two fish, but later I decided King's resentment went deeper. Looking back, I couldn't ever remember King doing anything petty. He'd often sailed a quarter-mile out of his way to congratulate a rival on a good thrust, and he'd even concede the skill of a harpooner he hated. But then he'd been "King of the Swordfishermen". It's easier to be generous when you're tops in your line than to watch a kid young enough to be your grandson doing the thing you loved to do, so well that he promised to be a great harpooner. Was that it? Was King jealous? I hated to think so because King was the squarest guy I'd ever known. But it sure looked that way.

I was still thinking of King's puzzling behavior as we closed in on the broadbill. Intent on the swordfish, we were scarcely aware of a power yacht gliding past until the boat rolled heavily in a beam swell.

The pulpit was nearly over the fish by then. Pierce was starting to drive down the harpoon. Caught unprepared by the roll, he was thrown toward the pulpit rail. Instead of checking his thrust until he'd regained his balance, he tried to send the dart home—and missed.

Luckily the swordfish was too startled to attack the boat. Spray glittered like diamonds and it was gone.

"Suffering sea serpents!" roared King. "Maybe I'd better make old Andy a harpooner!"

The kid flushed. "I wasn't expecting that swell," he shouted back.

"Perhaps I should have warned you. You're on a boat now, not a pier."

"I was afraid of losing that broadbill if I waited."

King snorted. "It wasn't boat-shy, and I would have reduced speed to give you another chance."

As the skipper continued his cutting remarks, the kid's mouth tightened as if holding in something he couldn't keep bottled up much longer.

"There ought to be another broadbill around somewhere," I interrupted, climbing to the duck-seat.

I put on dark glasses to cut sun-glare and about five minutes later saw another pair of fins. "Hard starboard," I cried. "There—*steady!*"

I directed King until we were an eighth of a mile from the fish and then I returned to the forward deck. Pierce's lean young jaw was taut as he pointed the harpoon. Firmly braced now, he waited until the last possible moment before raising and plunging the shaft.

A BLUE blaze streaked through the water, to vanish beneath a milky-green surge of foam. Then the broadbill surfaced in an explosion of spray. The seas boiled violently as the kid drew back the shaft with the line to free the dart. Before the next swell could smooth the shattered waters, there was a seething turmoil and the broadbill was in the air, its sword thrashing, its body flashing blue and silver in the sunlight as it fought vainly against the dart in its body. Both beautiful and terrifying in its power and fury, it seemed to defy gravity for an amazing time, twisting and jerking and quivering, yet when it fell back with a splash, the kid had not yet recovered the shaft.

He reached for it with his left hand, in fact, as the fish began to run, thus uncoiling line from the line-box on the forward hatch. I picked up this box to carry it aft when I heard a hoarse moan and turned. Pierce's left arm was stretched out beyond the curved pulpit rail and the harpoon line was bent around his wrist. His right hand was white with pressure as he gripped the rail to avoid being pulled overboard. It didn't surprise me that he'd

become fouled in the harpoon line; even experienced fishermen sometimes have a bight taken around wrist or ankle by a tightening line. What stopped me was not knowing what to do. Though planks are designed to take considerable stress, they have broken headstays or pulled down a mast with the weight of but a single man. Would our plank support both of us if I went to help the kid?

King's excited advice showed him to be equally confused. He bawled at the kid, "Slash the line!"

"Pierce hasn't got three fins!" I cried in exasperation. "Moment he lets go the rail to get his knife, he'll go overboard!"

Dropping the line-box, I decided to risk a second man on the plank. Though we'd be in the sea with an infuriated broadbill if the headstay parted, there wasn't anything else to do.

At that instant, however, the swordfish leapt, flashing dazzlingly above the rolling swells. King was already taking everything the engine could give, so we gained a little before the fish dropped. And that gave Pierce enough slack to free his bloody wrist.

He turned, white but grinning, to shout, "Get the box aft, Andy!"

I worked it along the starboard side, past the overhead supports, and dumped the unreeling line on the afterdeck. By the time the end was fast, the kid was there to help me heave the skiff overboard.

King immediately turned port. When the skiff was a quarter-mile astern, he left the wheel, descending to the afterdeck to look at the kid's raw and bleeding wrist.

The skipper's face was white with strain, and his remarks as Pierce washed the wrist would have blistered the paint on a bulkhead. I noticed, too, that King's hands shook as he applied iodine and dressings. His anger struck me as unreasonable, because the kid hadn't got himself fouled up on purpose. Nor had he lost the fish.

"Andy," King said, when he was through, "you take the wheel. Let Pierce be lookout."

"This wrist won't spoil my aim," Pierce said anxiously.

King glared. "You've blundered twice today. Isn't that plenty?"

The kid swallowed and didn't answer.

Pierce soon sighted fins nearly a mile away. King remarked dryly that it was probably a couple of birds or a hammerhead shark, but when we drew closer, I saw it was a swordfish.

The skipper unshackled the shaft from the pulpit rail and began directing me. Shouting directions might have made the broadbill sound. It seemed to be a good-sized fish, about four-hundred pounds by my estimate, and its long sword rippled the surface as it rose and fell in the swells. King hunched his right shoulder, bracing against the pain sure to come with violent exertion. It was foolish of him to try it because he always paid afterward with days of discomfort, often for no good purpose.

The kid was beside me as I spun the wheel one way, then back, trying to approach the fish dead on. King raised the harpoon, and when at last he drove it down, it hurt me to watch. His arm was so stiff that he had to use his back and his whole body to make the thrust.

Water hissed with a faint sucking sound at the bow. A cloud of spray drenched King.

"Nailed it!" Pierce cried, gripping my shoulder. "And with a stiff arm, too!" Then he was swiftly descending the ladder to secure the second harpoon to the keg floats.

King's dulled eyes and compressed lips spoke of the pain in his arm as he walked back woodenly along the plank.

I didn't know whether to admire his spunk or resent his stubbornness because I couldn't decide why he'd made the effort. Was he showing Pierce he could do his own harpooning if necessary? Or was it the jealousy of an older harpooner for a younger one—a refusal to admit that years and a stiff arm had taken their toll?

Whatever King's reasons, it made the kid try harder. He attempted to follow the skipper's advice, and he improved so steadily that I thought King should have left him alone. But he wouldn't. He criticized Pierce if he drove the harpoon down too soon, or waited too long; and if a broadbill was brought aboard and the dart had entered more than an inch from the backbone, the skipper had caustic comments to make about that as well. So much criticism might have made another harpooner blow up or quit, and knowing

the kid had plenty of spirit, I wondered why he took it. I guess it was because of his admiration for King, and he didn't seem to have the slightest suspicion that the skipper might be jealous.

ABOUT three months after Pierce joined our crew, he began to live up to his earlier promise. The weather had become balmy by then, the Pacific rolled in shimmering swells off Newport Beach, and swordfish were appearing in increasing numbers. Pierce harpooned fourteen broadbills that week without a single miss, and it wasn't until the end of that week that it occurred to me that King hadn't uttered a single word of criticism for seven days.

On the eighth day Pierce's luck changed. He harpooned a two-hundred pounder only a mile off the Newport breakwater, and then missed two. I couldn't see how he could be blamed for either failure. The first fish was boat-shy and sounded as we approached; it must have been twenty feet down before the pulpit was over the spot where it disappeared, and though Pierce hurled the harpoon, it did not touch the fish. The second fish veered swiftly as he drove the harpoon down, and the dart was embedded in the side of the fish and pulled out. The kid was in a blue funk from these failures, but once more King said nothing, perhaps because he was secretly pleased at Pierce's bad luck.

Cold, raw winds kept the broadbills down on Tuesday and Wednesday of that week. On Thursday the water was still ruffled so that it was difficult to see any distance, but we took one fish late that afternoon as we were returning. Friday was a perfect day and Pierce placed darts in two fish; and on Saturday he harpooned three more.

After mooring the boat, we rode in the truck that came to take our fish to the Randelli Fish Company. King went inside to speak to the manager, and I was starting home when the kid gripped my arm.

"How about a drink, Andy?" he asked.

About to refuse, I saw he was in high spirits as the result of our improved fortunes and laughed. "I'm not much of a drinker, but I'll have a beer."

We crossed the street to the Blue Sails Inn and ordered beers. The kid didn't seem to notice the mug set before him; his blue eyes were eager as he spoke of the day's fishing, and I guessed he just wanted someone to talk to.

He didn't have long to wait for a good listener, for Lonzo Winzell sidled up to ask, "How's fishing?"

"Great!" the kid said, grinning. "Have a drink?"

His slack mouth parting in a pleased smile, Winzell nodded. A fat and flabby man, with bleared and bloodshot eyes, it was hard to realize he'd once been a good fisherman. Now his boat needed repairs and he spent far more time trying to cadge drinks at different bars and complaining of his bad luck than than he did fishing. There were other swordfishermen like him, men who talked of big catches but, when pinned down, proved to be talking of catches in years gone by. You didn't hear much about the catches of men like King, who went out day after day, and brought in two hundred or more swordfish a year, because they were too busy to talk about their fishing.

After his third drink, Winzell started telling an experience I'd heard numerous times. Suddenly the door opened behind us, and a voice asked harshly, "So you're doing your fishing in the bar now, Pierce?"

I'd never seen King's face so rigid. The kid wheeled, color burning in his lean face.

"King," he snapped, "I'm fed up with being wet-nursed. I'm doing my job all right."

"That's what you think, lubber," King said, his voice cutting and scornful. "Do you think the three boatbills you got today make you salty? Real fishermen fish year after year from their boats and not with barflies like Winzell."

"I resent that," Winzell said.

King walked up to him and said, "Leave this kid alone, understand?" He put his big hand over Winzell's puffy face and pushed hard and Winzell staggered backward and went sprawling.

"King," Pierce said, his voice shaking, "you're going too damned far!"

"Think so?" King asked, turning. "I've just begun."

He started toward the kid. Pierce saw

the hardness of King's face, saw his clenched fists, but for a fraction of a moment he stood frozen. You saw the struggle in his face, the effort to overcome his respect and liking for the skipper. However, the kid had learned fighting in the school of war and he wasn't going to stand there and let King knock him down. There was only one thing to do, and he did it. His left came up so fast that the skipper barely had time to build a defense and blocking the blow must have hurt his stiff arm plenty. And King couldn't quite sidestep the right that followed, for the kid's knuckles left red lines along the side of his jaw.

The skipper was no longer flexible enough for anything like this, but he was still strong and knew an opening when he saw it. I'd seen him break a man's jaw with a single blow and I cringed as his left started on its way. Midway in its course, King's body stiffened as he tried to check the blow but he didn't quite succeed. Even its restrained force staggered Pierce as if a heavy sea had thrown him off-balance.

The skipper's hands dropped limply. The kid recovered his balance, his knuckles bulging a little, whitely, against his tanned flesh. Then his hands dropped, too, and his lips parted as though he were going to say something, then closed again.

"It's your business," King said abruptly, swinging toward the door.

Pierce watched the skipper until he disappeared and then looked at Lonzo Winzell, his hands shaking as he dusted himself off.

"How old are you?" Pierce asked.

"Fifty-five," said Winzell.

"Fifteen years younger than the skipper," the kid muttered thoughtfully. "King could murder you in a fight." He said brusquely to me, "To hell with fishing in a bar! Through, Andy?"

I nodded.

PETER PIERCE was sober-eyed and said little as we readied the boat for sailing the following morning. In some way that's hard to explain he looked older. There was no youthful air of excitement about him as he coiled harpoon lines and placed them in the line-boxes. He was a man, doing a man's job. I thought maybe he'd done some thinking about King and had come to a decision. But what it was, I couldn't guess.

When King appeared, much later than usual, he nodded but didn't smile. Both men seemed embarrassed and self-conscious and spoke only when necessary. As we spread foam astern, then chugged along the channel, I had a feeling that it wasn't going to be a very comfortable day.

We passed the summer homes, sailed between the bleak rock walls of the breakwaters, and at last rolled in the light and glistening swells. From aloft, I scanned the seas for an hour before I saw the fins of a broadbill.

Pierce somehow looked different as he went out on the plank. The suppressed tension he often tried to hide was missing. His cool and self-possessed sureness touched something in the back of my memory, but it was several minutes before I realized that he reminded me of King, when King was younger.

He waited on the bobbing plank, as calm as a man who forsees the outcome of a job he knows he can do well. It wasn't overconfidence; it appeared to go deeper to an inner consciousness of skill.

The swordfish appeared, rising on a swell, and was quickly hidden by the plank. Pierce raised the harpoon. I sensed that he had at last acquired the split-second timing that a good harpooner must have. He drove the shaft down and immediately jerked it back with the handline. There was a maelstrom of swirling waters and line began flowing from the box as the broadbill ran.

King offered no criticism.

Pierce helped me heave the skiff overside, and King turned away before the broadbill could swim under the boat, in which case the line might be cut by the screw.

I climbed to the operator's deck, but King stopped me before I could ascend the mast.

"There's another one dead ahead, Andy."

Pierce had seen it and was replacing a lily-rod. He had the harpoon ready in time. Once again he drove the dart accurately. The broadbill leapt from the seas three times before taking line. I made the end fast to keg floats and dumped them overboard.

Ten minutes after I'd returned to the duck-seat, I spied another broadbill and half an hour later it was secured to floats as well.

King cruised for a while, but presently turned back and ran alongside the skiff so that Pierce could jump in.

Our harpooner started the heavy work of pulling up the first broadbill. It was nearly worn out from fighting the skiff and made no attempt to attack; Pierce killed it with a single thrust of the whale-lance. I started the winch motor as King sailed alongside the skiff again, then swung the boom over and lowered the winch hook. Pierce made the harpoon line fast to it, and in a minute the first swordfish was aboard.

King towed the skiff to the nearest floats, and Pierce heaved up and killed the second fish as well. As soon as it was aboard, I took his place. The third broadbill had more fight, swimming in short dashes as I brought it in close, but when I drove the lance into its gills, its struggles ceased.

Pierce helped me aboard, showing no trace of the excitement he usually displayed at a good catch. "Better get aloft, Andy," he said soberly. "A boat brought seven broadbills into Santa Barbara one day last week. Maybe, if the swordfish have moved south, we might do as well."

I doubted this when I'd settled on my high seat. The seas were puckering and the ocean breeze growing chill. It would be hard to see a pair of fins even half a mile away.

That didn't prove necessary, however, for a short time later I made out a swordfish only a few hundred yards off our port beam. Pierce barely had time to replace a lily-rod and fix the copper dart on it before the pulpit was hiding the fish each time the plank climbed against the sky.

The broadbill went down, probably fifteen feet beneath the surface, before Pierce was close enough to hurl the harpoon. His deliberate aiming made him appear slow, but the shaft cut the water like an arrow. For a fractional second the seas rippled around the disappearing line. Then water bubbled and foamed, a blaze of bluish-silver appearing briefly just under the surface, then vanishing again. Farther beyond our bow, the seas erupted a moment later, and the broadbill was dancing on its tail, the line jerking and weaving with the wild movements of its body. When it disappeared and the line began rattling in its box, I breathed easier, for you never know when a broadbill will attack a boat or even leap onto the deck.

After leaving the fish with the skiff, we circled, hoping to find a second one. The seas were riffling, the swells growing heavy, and our chances were poor. But our luck continued, for within a few minutes I sighted a pair of fins. Despite the pitching of the boat, which made the pulpit wretched footing for an accurate thrust, Pierce placed a dart in the fifth broadbill that day.

We left it anchored to floats, searching again. But by now the wind was cold enough to drive most swordfish down, and the seas were so heavy I couldn't have seen a pair of fins over a hundred yards away.

"No use looking any longer," King called to me, as he started toward the skiff. "We'll call it a day."

I DROPPED into the skiff and killed the first swordfish with no difficulty. After it was aboard, Pierce took my place, while King circled away in case the fish might still have fight.

That broadbill did! The line weaved rapidly through the seas as Pierce heaved it in. At times a broadbill fails to exhaust itself dragging skiff or floats. That's when swordfishermen's boats are attacked, when they may be killed. The speed with which the line cut the water showed that there was a very lively and irate broadbill on the other end.

"Let go!" King shouted, turning the boat toward the skiff. "That fish can't be pulled up yet!"

The wind whistling through the rigging, the rumbling of the engine as we bucked the rising swells, smothered King's voice. Pierce continued reeling in line.

King increased our speed. The line was now perpendicular to the boat and rising rapidly. As we approached, the broadbill broke water less than fifty feet from the skiff. It fought the line, its caudal fin thrashing, then half-rolled from the tension on the line.

The skipper had been steering toward

the opposite side of the skiff to avoid fouling the line. But something in the broadbill's behavior gave him warning. I looked up and saw him briefly spin the wheel. And when I glanced back, the broadbill's sword cleft the water in swift ripples as it sped toward Pierce.

"It's going to ram!" I shouted, looking up.

King nodded, his lips drawn. We moved at full speed to place the boat between Pierce and the attacking fish. My mouth went dry. I realized there wasn't a shred of hope of our ten knots enabling us to do it.

Pierce dropped the line and seized the lance. Gripping it with both hands, he held it to one side so it wouldn't be driven through him if he succeeded in meeting the swift charge.

And then, fifteen feet from the skiff, the swordfish changed course, turning toward our bow. I drew a sharp breath. King must have hoped for this! Hoped that a moving target would attract the enraged fish more than a stationary one. When it struck, over five hundred pounds moving at great speed, the boat quivered from the impact.

I ran forward and saw the fish impaled by its sword in our hull and still feebly struggling. Pierce pulled the skiff around the bow, and quickly killed it.

I brought the fire-axe and he chopped the sword off, leaving a portion in the hull. King left the gear-lever in neutral, descending to the afterdeck to operate the winch.

In a few minutes we had the fish and the skiff aboard.

Pierce spoke then, an undercurrent of emotion in his voice: "Go on, say it, King! I did something lubberly, and now your precious boat is damaged! No matter how hard I try, I always do something wrong!"

"There's no man so good he can't improve," said King quietly.

"Maybe that's true," Pierce cried, his eyes flashing, "but from what I hear you didn't ride your other harpooners the way you ride me."

"Why should I? They didn't have what it takes to make great harpooners."

Pierce's jaw sagged; he must have noticed the twinkle in King's eyes.

"Call it pride, if you want," said the skipper gently, "but the *Swordfishing King* was always high boat until my accident. Its name means something along this coast. I wasn't going to let just any harpooner have my boat, he had to be the best. You came closest to being the man I wanted, but you had to have a lot of kid foolishness knocked out of you and some fishing sense drilled in."

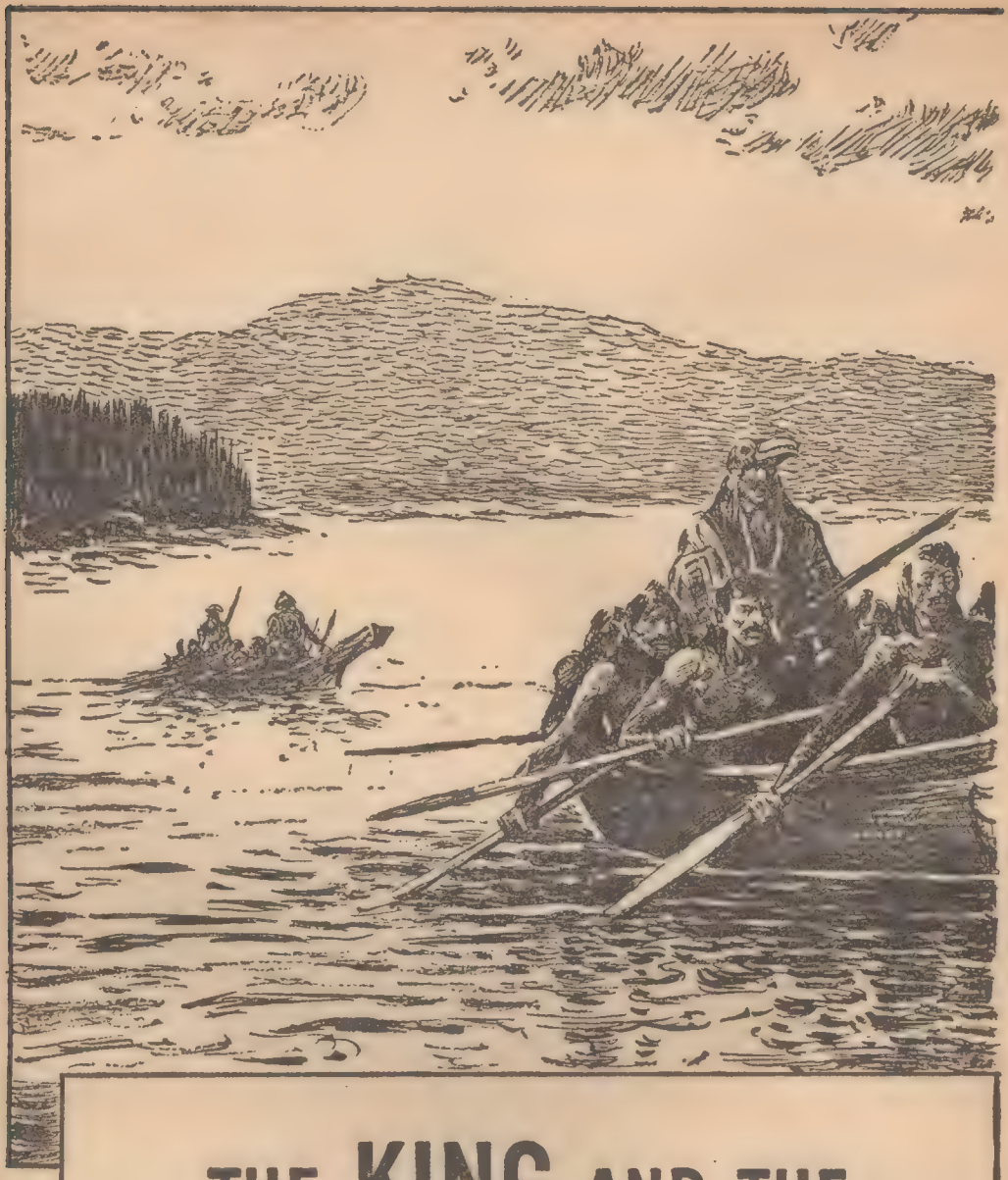
"You drilled too hard," said Pierce. "I don't think I want to sail with you again." But his voice didn't carry great conviction; you could see he still liked King.

"I believe you'll sail on your own boat," said the skipper, his mouth twitching at the corners. "This morning I had my lawyer draw up papers giving you and Andy third shares in this boat. I owe it to Andy; he's been a good shipmate for years, but he can't save money. I'm giving you a third share because I owe it to my boat. And I'm keeping a share because there's nothing I ever saw more worth watching than a good harpooner in the pulpit. Don't see why someone else shouldn't shoulder part of my responsibilities. I have more money than I need, and no relatives to leave it to."

A slow smile crept over Pierce's face. "You got what you wanted, didn't you, King?"

The skipper flushed slightly. "Well, my boat stands for something."

"Sure," said Pierce, his grin warm and friendly. "And so do you."



THE KING AND THE COCKNEY SLAVE

A FACT STORY

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFER

It was an amphibious operation—the troops went north in forty war-canoes.

BEFORE the disaster, she was the finest ship in the Pacific. Her holds were choked with rum and trinkets for a two-year trading voyage. Her name was the *Boston,* and on March 22, 1803, she lay near misnamed Friendly Cove not far from the village of Nootka on the Pacific side of huge Vancouver Island.

The *Boston* was entertaining royalty. King Maquina of the Nootka tribe had come aboard to visit Captain John Salter. The day before, the king had left the vessel in a huff after a quarrel about possible defects in a musket Salter had given him. But today he seemed to have forgotten the incident.

By MURRAY MORGAN

Maquina was a square-shouldered, delicate-featured Indian who stood about five feet, seven and weighed 160 pounds. He was dressed regally in a cape of sea-otter skins, worth at the time about $20,000. He also had on a layer of bear-grease a quarter-inch thick and covered with silver mica, which gave an effect undreamed of by modern cosmeticians. His hair was oiled, braided and dusted with white feathers.

The king suggested that Salter send a party of men to Friendly Cove, where the salmon were running. Salter, who seems to have been a sucker for a fish story, dispatched two groups of fishermen, one in the ship's yawl and the other in the longboat. And from that point the story belongs to 19-year-old John Jewitt, the ship's armorer, who was cleaning muskets in the steerage:

"I HEARD the men hoisting in the longboat, which, in a few minutes after, was succeeded by a great bustle and confusion on deck. I immediately ran up the steerage stairs, but scarcely was my head above deck when I was caught by the hair by one of the savages and lifted from my feet. Fortunately for me, my hair being short and the ribbon with which it was tied slipping, I fell from his hold into the steerage. As I was falling he struck at me with an axe, which cut a deep gash in my forehead and penetrated the skull, but in consequence of his losing hold I escaped the full force of the blow, which otherwise would have cleft my head in two.

"I fell, stunned and senseless, upon the floor. Upon recovering consciousness, I heard three loud shouts from the savages, which convinced me that they had got possession of the ship.

"I remained in a horrid state of suspense for a very long time, when at length the hatch was opened. Maquina, calling me by name, ordered me to come up. I groped my way up as well as I was able, being almost blinded with blood that flowed from my wound and so weak that I found difficulty in walking. The king, on perceiving my situation, ordered one of his men to bring a pot of water to wash the blood from my face. I was then able to see distinctly with one eye, but the other was so swollen that it was closed.

"But what a terrific spectacle met my sight: six naked savages, standing in a circle around me, covered with the blood of my murdered comrades, with their daggers uplifted in their hands, prepared to strike. I thought my last moment had come and commended my soul to my Maker.

"The king, who knew enough English to make himself understood, entered the circle and placing himself before me, addressed me nearly in the following words, 'John—I speak—you no say no. You say no—daggers come.'

"He then asked me if I would be his slave during my life, if I would fight for him in his battles, if I would repair his muskets and make daggers and knives for him, to all of which I was careful to answer yes.

"He then told me that he would spare my life, and ordered me to kiss his hands and feet to show my submission to him, which I did. In the meantime his people were very clamorous to have me put to death, so that there should be none of us left to tell our story to our countrymen, but the king in the most determined manner opposed their wishes.

"He told me to drink some rum from a bottle which he handed me. I took a draught of it, after which, taking me by the hand, he led me to the quarterdeck, where the most horrid sight presented itself that ever my eyes witnessed.

"The heads of our unfortunate captain and his crew, to the number of twenty-five, were all arranged in a line. Maquina, ordering one of his people to bring a head, asked me whose it was. I answered, the captain's. In like manner the others were showed me, and I told him the names, excepting a few that were so horribly mangled that I was not able to recognize them.

"I discovered that all our unfortunate crew had been massacred. After getting possession of the ship, the savages had broke open the arms-chest and magazine and, supplying themselves with ammunition and arms, sent a party on shore to attack our men who had gone thither to fish. They overpowered and murdered them. After cutting off their heads they brought them on board, throwing the bodies into the sea.

"Looking upon the deck, I saw it en-

tirely covered with the blood of my poor comrades, whose throats had been cut with their own jackknives, the savages having seized the opportunity while they were busy hoisting in the longboat to grapple with them and overpower them by their numbers. In the scuffle the captain was thrown overboard and despatched by those in the canoes, who immediately cut off his head."

JEWITT was a Cockney lad who had joined the Yankee ship at Hull, England, the year before. Maquina sent him ashore and assigned him sleeping space in the royal cabin, a cedar building forty yards long. The prisoner, who was not dumb, immediately made friends with the king's favorite son, Sat-Sat-Sok-Sis, by giving the boy the gold buttons from his greatcoat.

Late that night there was a great commotion in the royal bedchamber. A warrior rushed in to tell Maquina that another white man had been found alive, hiding in the hold. Maquina gave orders to leave the captive aboard the *Boston* until morning when he could be killed more conveniently.

"As I was trying to think of some plan for his preservation," Jewitt declared later, "it all at once came into my mind that this man was probably the sail-maker of the ship, named Thompson, as I had not seen his head among those on deck, and knew that he was below at work upon sails not long before the attack.

"Thompson was a man nearly forty years of age, and had an old look. I conceived it would be easy to make him pass for my father and by this means prevail on Maquina to spare his life. Towards morning I fell into a doze, but was awakened with the first beams of the sun by the king, who ordered me to accompany him. I rose and followed him, leading with me the young prince, his son.

"Coming to the beach, I found all the men of the tribe assembled. The king addressed them, saying that one of the white men had been found alive on board the ship. He requested their opinion as to saving his life or putting him to death. They were unanimously for the latter.

"Then I asked him, pointing to the boy, if he loved his son. He said he did. I asked the child if he loved his father. On his replying in the affirmative, I said, 'And I also love mine.'

"I then threw myself on my knees at Maquina's feet and implored him, with tears in my eyes, to spare my father's life, if the man on board should prove to be him. I said that if he killed my father it was my wish that he should kill me too, and that if he did not, I would kill myself —and he would thus lose my services.

"Maquina appeared moved by my entreaties. He promised not to put the man to death if he should be my father. He then explained to his people what I had said, and ordered me to go on board and tell the man to come on shore.

"To my unspeakable joy on going into the hold I found my conjecture true. Thompson was there. He had escaped without any injury excepting a slight wound in the nose.

"I informed him in a few words that all our men had been killed, that the king had preserved my life and had consented to spare his on the supposition that he was my father, an opinion which he must be careful not to undeceive them in, as it was his only safety. After giving him his cue, I went on shore with him and presented him to Maquina, who immediately knew him to be the sailmaker and was much pleased, observing that he could make sails for his canoe."

Thompson was not a model slave. The Yankee was a tough old sailor who had free-lanced in several wars. He was uncertain whether life as a slave was preferable to death. He took no lip from his masters. Once Maquina's eldest son, a boy of seventeen, himself a chief, joined with some of the younger children in teasing Thompson. They caused him to spill whale oil on the blankets he was cleaning. Thompson squared off and beat the boy unconscious. The king might have killed him but for the fortunate fact that the blankets that were dirtied were Maquina's.

Thompson was illiterate, but he had a great respect for writing and routine. He talked Jewitt into keeping a regular journal. The young blacksmith's account of his captivity has provided scholars with their best single source of material about the early life of the Indians on Vancouver Island. Jewitt even wrote a dictionary of the Nootkian language; its value is somewhat decreased by the fact

that in rendering the spellings phonetically Jewitt had a Cockney's usual difficulties with the letter H.

A month after her capture, the *Boston* was burned. A warrior prowling through the hold in search of molasses dropped his torch in some cotton matting. The ship blossomed flame.

"It was a most melancholy sight," Jewitt lamented, "for with her disappeared from our eyes every trace of a civilized country." But a few days later he was rejoicing in her destruction. The Indians found among the supplies saved from the vessel a tierce of rum—forty-two gallons. They went on the biggest bender in tribal history.

"They became so extremely wild and frantic that Thompson and myself, apprehensive for our safety, thought it prudent to retire privately into the woods, where we continued till past midnight. The burning of our ship, which we had lamented so much, now appeared to us in a very different light, for had the savages got possession of the rum, of which there were nearly twenty puncheons of eighty-four gallons each on board, we must inevitably have fallen a sacrifice to their fury in some of their moments of intoxication."

Jewitt opened the Pacific Coast's first temperance campaign by boring a hole in the bottom of the rum cask while his captors were sleeping off the night before.

AS SLAVERY goes, Jewitt's was not so bad. He was well treated. His duties were to keep Maquina's hut supplied with wood and to make arms and trinkets for the chief and his wives. Anything he made in his spare time he was allowed to sell. Since metal work was much in demand, young Jewitt was soon rather rich in whale oil, fern roots, clam shells and other symbols of wealth at Nootka.

He was also famous. Chiefs came from miles around to try to buy him, but Maquina would not sell, even when the price was ten blankets, four slaves, two dugouts and a smoked whale eye.

Jewitt enjoyed these dickerings, not because he was proud of the value placed on him but because he was sometimes able to bribe the visiting chiefs, or members of their retinue, to carry away notes to be delivered to the captain of any ship they saw.

As time passed, the slaves came to be considered part of the tribe. When war broke out, they were drafted. The warriors went into basic training, which consisted of taking a bath every day for ten days, keeping away from women, and repeating a prayer that they would find the enemy asleep.

It was an amphibious operation. The troops went north in forty war-canoes, each holding from ten to twenty men. Their prayers were answered and they found the enemy asleep.

"All being ready for the attack," reported Jewitt, who wasn't a bad war correspondent, "we landed with the greatest silence and going around so as to come upon the foe in the rear clambered up the hill.

"Our warriors, as is their custom, entered the huts, creeping on all fours. My comrade and myself stationed ourselves without, so as to intercept those who should attempt to escape or to come to the aid of their friends.

"I wished, if possible, not to stain my hands in the blood of any fellow creature. Though Thompson would gladly have put to death all the savages in the country, he was too brave to think of attacking a sleeping enemy.

"The Nootkas entered the houses. Maquina seized the head of the enemy chief and gave him the fatal blow. He uttered a great war-whoop and all proceeded to the work of death. The enemy, being thus surprised, were unable to make resistance. With the exception of a very few, they were all killed or taken prisoner on condition of being slaves.

"I had the good fortune to take four captives, whom Maquina, as a favor, permitted me to consider as mine and occasionally employ in fishing for me. As for Thompson, who thirsted for revenge, he had no wish to take any prisoners. With his cutlass, the only weapon he would employ against them, he succeeded in killing seven stout fellows who came to attack him, an act which obtained him great credit with Maquina and the chiefs, who after this held him in much higher estimation.

"After having put to death all the old and infirm of either sex, and destroyed the buildings, we re-embarked with our booty in our canoes for Nootka. We were

received with great demonstrations of joy. The women and children accompanied our war-song with a most furious drumming on the houses."

Soon after the battle Jewitt's engagement was announced. Maquina announced it to him, saying that the chiefs all agreed he must marry. Jewitt objected that he did not like any of the Nootka debutantes. Maquina said that was all right, he would buy a wife for Jewitt from another tribe.

And, sure enough, he did. Maquina had to make quite a speech to a neighboring chief before that worthy would turn over his daughter to be the wife of a slave. Maquina spoke for half an hour "saying that I was as good a man as themselves, differing from them only in being white, that I was acquainted with many things of which they were ignorant; that I knew how to make daggers, jewelry and harpoons, and was a very valuable person."

Jewitt described his bride as "about seventeen, her person was small, but well formed, as were her features; her complexion was without exception fairer than any of the women, with considerable colour in her cheeks; her hair long, black and much softer than is usual with them, and her teeth small, even, and of a dazzling whiteness, while the expression of her countenance indicated sweetness of temper and modesty."

But he looked on her as a ball-and-chain, fettering him to the Indians with bonds of sentiment and blood. As long as he had an Indian wife he knew the tribe would never let him go. After she became pregnant he talked Maquina into sending her home to her father.

MORE than two years after the destruction of the *Boston*, the brig *Lydia* stood into Nootka Bay. Her captain, Sam Hill of Boston, had received one of the sixteen notes Jewitt dispatched by visiting chiefs.

Ashore there was great excitement. Some of the natives proposed killing Thompson and Jewitt immediately. Others suggested sending them back to the hills. But Maquina had other ideas.

The chief asked Jewitt if he wanted to go aboard the ship. Jewitt smelled a trap and said no. It was the right answer. Maquina decided that if his favorite slave did not want to go aboard the ship he was contented to stay with the tribe. He then asked if Jewitt thought that he, the chief, would be safe in visiting the ship. Jewitt said yes. He asked if Jewitt would write him a letter of introduction to the captain. Jewitt said he would.

The natives were aghast. But Maquina argued that Jewitt did not want to leave, that he had never deceived them, that he could be trusted. He told Jewitt to write him a nice letter. Jewitt obliged. The letter read:

To Captain ——,
of the Brig ——

Nootka, July 19, 1805

Sir,—The bearer of this letter is the Indian king by the name of Maquina. He was the instigator of the capture of the ship *Boston*, of Boston, in North America, John Salter, captain, and of the murder of twenty-five men of her crew, the two only survivors being now on shore. Wherefore I hope you will take care to confine him according to his merits, putting in your dead-lights, and keeping so good a watch over him that he cannot escape you. By so doing, we shall be able to obtain our release in the course of a few hours.

JOHN R. JEWITT, Armourer of the "Boston," for himself, and
JOHN THOMPSON, Sail-maker of the said ship

When Jewitt gave Maquina the letter, the chief asked him to translate it. He did so, translating each word as Maquina pointed at it. As read aloud, the letter said that the chief was a nice guy and that the captain should give him lots of molasses, biscuits and rum.

When the captive finished his rather loose translation, the chief looked him straight in the eye: "John, you no lie?"

The boy felt the tell-tale blood rush to his face. But he was wearing a thick layer of grease streaked with ochre, and his blush did not show. "Why do you ask me such a question, Tyee? Have you ever known me to lie?"

"No."

"Then how can you suppose I should tell you a lie now, since I have never done it?"

The king's wives howled in anguish as Maquina and his retinue paddled out to the ship. The warriors waited anxiously on the shore.

Maquina presented his letter of recommendation to Captain Hill. He was seized

and put in chains. His companions were sent back on shore with instructions to return with the white men.

When the natives saw the canoe returning without their king "both men and women set up a loud howl and ran backwards and forwards upon the shore, scratching their faces and tearing their hair out in handfuls."

The king's messengers reported that John had written bad things about Maquina and that the king was prisoner. The angry natives rushed at the youth, threatening to cut him in pieces no bigger than their thumb-nails, or to burn him alive over a slow fire suspended by his heels.

But Jewitt knew how highly they valued their king, both as a person and a symbol.

"Kill me!" he shouted, throwing open the bearskin cape he wore. "Here is my breast. I am one among many and can make no resistance. But unless you wish to see your king hanging by his neck to that pole," and he pointed to the yardarm of the brig, "with the sailors firing at him with bullets, you will not do it."

They calmed down. An exchange of prisoners was arranged. Thompson was sent aboard the brig with word that the natives would bring Jewitt halfway out to the vessel, then wait for the longboat to come to them with Maquina. Then they would swap master for slave.

But in their excitement the Indians let Jewitt keep the pistol he had been allowed to wear since his marriage. Once out of range of shore, he pulled the gun and forced the paddlers to take him straight to the *Lydia*.

Captain Hill was all for killing the chief. Jewitt talked him out of it. "I observed that, however ill he might have acted in taking our ship, yet that it might perhaps be wrong to judge an uninformed savage with the same severity as a civilized person, who had the light of religion and the laws of society to guide him. Maquina's conduct in taking our ship arose from an insult that he thought he had received from Captain Salter, and from the unjustifiable conduct of some masters of previous vessels who had robbed him and without provocation killed a number of his people."

Hill said he would leave it entirely up to Jewitt whether to kill Maquina or spare him.

Jewitt replied that he most certainly would not take the life of a man who had saved his own. The king was held until his subjects brought out from shore all the material they still possessed from the *Boston*. This included Jewitt's journal of his experiences.

The parting was strangely pleasant. Maquina gave the captain his mantle of sea otter pelts. The captain gave Maquina a wool coat. Both were pleased.

The chief went to his former captive and shook him by the hand. Maquina said he hoped John would come to see him again in a big ship and bring much plenty of blankets, molasses and rum. He promised that he would keep all the furs he took and not trade any of them until Jewitt came back.

Then he started down the rope ladder. He paused, looked up, and said he would never again board a white man's ship unless Jewitt were aboard to protect him.

Nor would he ever again carry a letter of recommendation.

Just to be sure, he took the Berbers and went back along the beach.

THE WHIP

By VIC SPIES

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGER L. THOMAS

HE STOOD there thinking about it long after the patrol boat was gone and it was enough to scare anybody. He kept seeing the captain's eyes looking at him as though it were for the last time, and he didn't like it.

Overhead the African sun was a white-hot stove lid that flattened the warehouse corrugations and painted the big block of

the prison with an eye-aching spotlessness. The smell of raw hides on the wharf and the sulphuric tang of the tannery lay on the lungs like a woolen blanket.

Just to be sure, he took the Berbers and went back along the beach under the bleak cliffs and then up through the dunes to the mouth of the river, but it was just the same. Even the Berbers who could read sand better than their own names couldn't see tracks that weren't there.

There were plenty of sharks just beyond the breakers, big ones, their dorsals cleaving the glare of the swells lazily and contented-like. There were plenty of crocodiles in the river slime, too, monsters with myopic orbs hooded in sluggish satisfaction. Any one of either could have managed a man's body and maybe that's where his predecessor's was, and then again maybe it wasn't.

You could read what you wanted to into it—like you had to with the power furnace and the deep acid vats. Like the captain had for his report. But that didn't settle it.

The captain could shrug and set down a question mark and come back next year; it was nothing to him. A high tide and dunes that had crawled all night under a hot wind were good enough answers. The governor didn't care so long as he got his share; he never came near the place. Nobody cared. He didn't himself. Juan Cardoza was just another name.

But that was the catch. It wasn't just Juan Cardoza. It was Arranda and Delgado and Montoya, too, and four men didn't just vanish without leaving some trace. And each on the night before their relief was due!

HE WENT up and stared into the furnace again until his face started to blister. He climbed the cat-walk beside the vats and worked the long pole among the hides until the fumes blinded him, but it was like the beach and the dunes. You couldn't be sure without cooling the furnace and emptying the vats and that would put him a week behind, maybe more—and that wasn't what he had come to this hell-hole for. He had a year to clean up in and every minute counted.

The sweetish smell of finished leather goods drifted through the acrid sting of the vats and the sound of the stitching treadles merged with the throb of the furnace. A year from now he would be on his way back to Madrid and a gay retirement with Carmen and Rosita and —all the others. And these poor fools who had seen fit to speak out against the Generalissimo during the revolution would still be sitting here at their benches carving leather, more hollow-eyed and emaciated than they were now—those that were still alive.

A year from now? He saw the captain's eyes again, giving him that long parting look. He wiped his own burning ones and gazed about the suffocating room. Supposing he did rake the furnace and drain the vats and there wasn't anything there?

He was wringing wet—an odd, clammy kind of wetness. He went along the ramp to his quarters and poured out a stiff drink. But he just stared at it, seeing again the dull, expressionless faces of the prisoners as the captain questioned them, hearing their monotonous carbon-copy answer.

Commandant Cardoza? They had last seen him at dusk when he came down to bid them *adios*. He was celebrating his retirement and he couldn't get back up the stairs so they carried him up and put him on his cot.

They. Like they were one. Six hundred of them.

He spun toward the file cabinet, thumbed through Arranda's folder. Through Delgado's. Through Montoya's. The same. Carbon-copies of a carbon-copy story.

It was a lie! Nothing repeated with such perfect sameness. Coincidence was accidental and this wasn't accidental—it was some well-planned plot, some fiendish, sadistic scheme for revenge!

He swung back to the cot. Neat and smooth, with the cat-o'-nine-tails coiled like an albino adder in the center. Nine cleverly braided knots tipping long corded strands that ran into a delicately woven and intricately tooled grip—a grimly ironic yet flawless masterpiece fashioned with the loving care of artisans.

A lie? If you wanted to cover up something you didn't repeat it until it became obvious.

Father Enrique said it wasn't. He had come up from the chapel and stood there listening. They crossed themselves when they saw him—and answered the same answer. Mild, mousy men. Ex-professors and political appointees who had chosen the wrong cause. Listless, docile creatures still clinging to the dream that one day the Generalissimo would be overthrown and they would be freed.

Dismissed, they crossed themselves again and went out, their retreating backs a maze of seared and livid lashes. Not the embossment of welts but neatly carved grooves where the skin had been removed with scalpel-like preciseness—as though under their own tools. Nine in each cluster.

Cardoza and the others had been masters with the lash—and so was he! Their benign, mousy mien would get them nothing.

The coil on the cot seemed to be moving, setting itself like the deadly reptile it resembled, getting ready to strike back in retaliation, to lash out in reprisal. It was the heat waves, of course. Only there weren't any; a morgue-like chill from the whirring cooler swam through the room.

He worked the sweat out of his eyes and sat down, his corded wrists dripping.

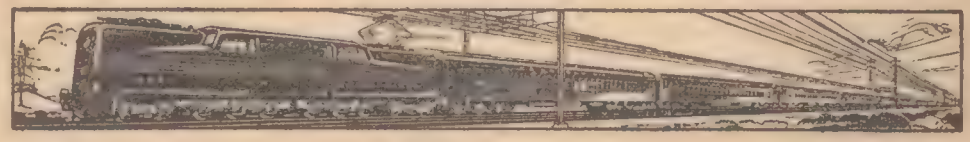
Always a new coil, the captain said, ready and waiting for the new master. A repetition—like the rest of it. A part of some subtle pattern that promised to add the name of Ramon Jesus Escobar to the others.

It was a trick to frighten him, to relieve the pressure. Well, it wouldn't work. They'd produce like they'd never produced. And he'd find out what had happened to Cardoza and the others before he was through!

Through? He picked up the glass and drained it in one gulp. And then he wheeled back. If they had put Juan Cardoza on his cot why was it so neat and smooth—why didn't it show the imprint of his body?

He jerked forward, one hand darting out, clutching the coil. So they'd carried the commandant up and laid him on his cot, had they? You didn't have to lie about a thing if you told it a certain way—told it so one could read anything into it but the way it really was. Devils! They'd change their gramophone story now if he had to flog every last one of them to death. They! The whole six hundred!

His wet fingers tightened on the coil. Soft, pliant, warm. More supple than any of the finished goods in the storeroom. Some special process. Some special kind of skin too. Not regular stock, but fine-textured and with fine, silky hairs still in the pores—hairs like those on his own—his own suddenly shaking—own suddenly icy . . .



Five Times 'Round the World

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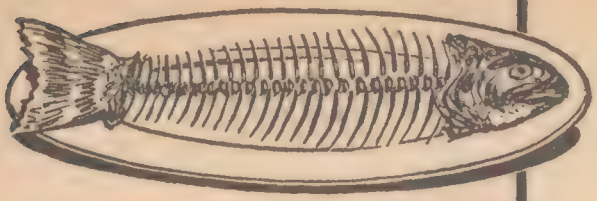
RAILROAD MAGAZINE

205 E. 42nd St., New York City 17

By ROBERT GRIFFITH



TROUT

DECORATION BY PETER KUHLHOFF

IT WAS getting dark, and Pa lit the kerosene lamp. We had eaten the trout, and we sat looking at the fish bones on the platter. The head and tail were still on the long backbone, the head hanging over one edge of the platter, and the tail over the other.

"Yes, Orly," Pa said, giving me a proud look, "you're a real fisherman now. That was only a fair-sized trout you caught last week, but this one here is a genuine whopper."

Pa had always made fun of me for bringing home little trout. He had acted disappointed in me. And the week before, when I had caught what I considered a good-sized trout, he had just looked at it and laughed—though he had eaten his full share of it that night. But I had made up my mind then to bring home a *big* trout; and now I had done it.

As we sat there, looking at the bones, footfalls sounded outside, coming up the path. And a funny thing happened: I began to get the feeling I always got when I was going to be punished!

There was a knock, and Pa called out, "Come in, come in!"

The door opened, and my breath caught. Old Bell stood in the doorway.

"Come in, Mr. Bell!" Pa said. He jumped up and went to the table. "Say, take a look here!" He was smiling, pointing to the fish bones on the platter. "Wouldn't you call that a *trout?*"

Old Bell glanced at the bones and let out a snarl. His eyes snapped back to me. His mouth was working and his ears moving up and down. I backed against the wall, watching him.

"Look at it!" Pa said. He was peering at old Bell, waiting to see his surprise at the size of the trout bones. "Wouldn't you call *that* a trout?"

Old Bell wouldn't take his squinting eyes off me. "Boy where'd you catch that trout?" he said.

Pa laughed. "He won't tell! Ain't that a fisherman for you?" Pa was jiggling the platter, trying to make old Bell look at it. "Ever see a trout the size of this one caught around here? Look at it!"

OLD Bell stood there, whistling when he breathed, squinting right through me. I knew he had found out, some way, and was going to tell Pa on me. I knew I was going to be punished; but I wanted to tell Pa first.

I wanted to explain.

"Pa, you made fun of me when I brought home little trout!"

"Aha!" Pa said, patting me on the head, beaming. "Can't make fun of you now, Orly-boy! Not after this one! That was only a fair-sized trout you caught last week, but this one is the biggest I ever saw caught hereabouts! How about it, Mr. Bell?" Pa picked up the platter and held it right under old Bell's nose. "Look at it!" he said.

"Don't want to look at it!" old Bell snarled. He threw up his fist and knocked the platter out of Pa's hands. It fell crashing to the floor, fish bones and all. Old Bell started kicking at the long backbone and head and tail, as if it was a snake and he trying to kill it.

Pa grabbed him. "Hold on, Mr. Bell! That's Orly's trout you're kicking around!"

"No, no, Pa!" I cried. "It's Mr. Bell's trout!"

Pa let go of old Bell. He turned and looked at me. "What's that you said, Orly?"

"It's Mr. Bell's trout, Pa!"

POISONING

"My well trout!" old Bell sputtered. "Your boy caught it out of my well! He was seen taking it! Had that trout in my well fourteen years!"

Pa stood gaping at old Bell, his face getting red. He glanced at the fish bones on the floor, and looked embarrassed. I wished I hadn't deceived Pa. When he turned to me, I couldn't meet his eye.

"Why, Orly," he said, "don't you know it's a serious thing to catch a man's well trout out of his well?"

I nodded my head, not looking at Pa. I had sort of forgotten why people kept trout in their wells—to purify the water. The wells were so dark and deep a trout couldn't be seen in a well; and I had figured that as long as people *thought* their well trout was down there, it wouldn't make any difference whether it was or not.

"Pa," I said, trying to explain, "even when I caught a fair-sized trout, you laughed at me! I had to catch a big one for you!"

Pa gave me a stern look. "I'd rather have no trout at all than one stolen from somebody's well," he said. He turned to old Bell. "I'm sorry about this, Mr. Bell," he said. "Do you want Orly should be punished?"

Old Bell's eyes seemed to light up. He was squinting at me, whistling when he breathed, and his mouth and ears were working faster than ever. I had a terrible fear Pa was going to turn me over to him for a horsewhipping. But old Bell's mouth was working itself into kind of a grin.

"Too late!" he said. "Only reason I come over—I was worried!"

Pa blinked at old Bell. "Worried, Mr. Bell?"

"Yes, worried!" old Bell said. "Knew some folks got hard up and caught their well trout and et it. Been down in the well for years, that trout had, purifying the water, taking out the poison." Old Bell was squinting from Pa to me. "Absorbed it, he did! Trout absorbed that poison! Whole family like to died!"

With that, old Bell gave a funny laugh and went out the door, slamming it shut after him. Pa and I stood listening to his footfalls stamping down the path. Pa looked so serious I felt sorry for him. I felt guilty, too, when I saw him prodding absent-mindedly at his stomach.

"Pa," I said, "I think old Bell just made up that story."

Pa shook his head. He looked at me then, and he was smiling in a worried way. "Well, if we suffer, Orly, we'll suffer together," he said. "I guess it was as much my fault as yours. I should have been satisfied with that fair-sized trout you caught."

And then Pa went to the cupboard and took out the castor oil bottle. I wanted to stop him, but I didn't dast! He poured out a big tablespoonful, and drank it down.

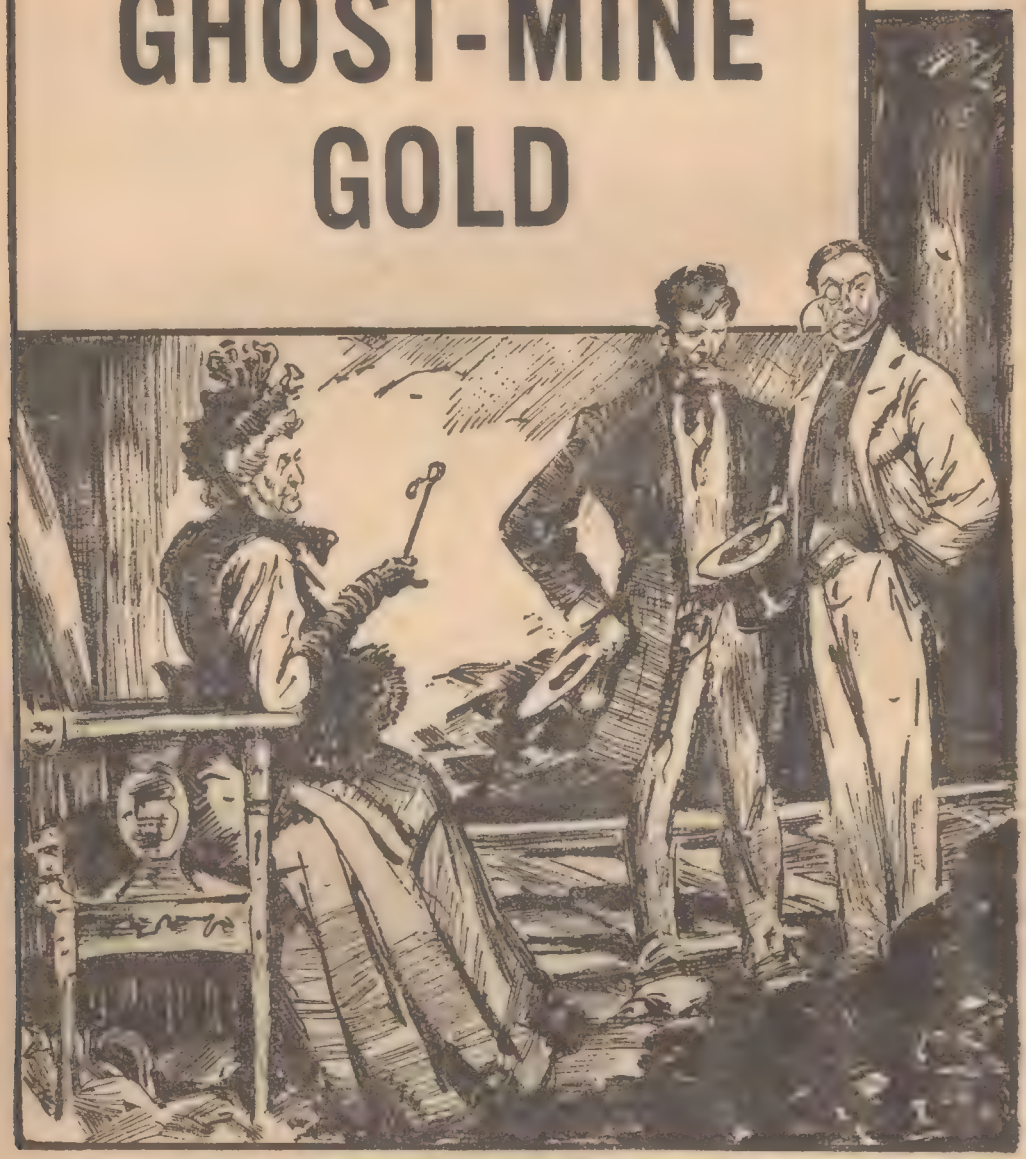
Poor Pa! He stood there, shuddering, holding his nose to keep down the taste of the oil. I wished then I'd told him the whole truth! I'd known all the time there wasn't any danger of poisoning. We hadn't got sick from eating my fair-sized trout—and I had caught that one out of our own well!

Pa filled up another brimming spoonful. "All right, Orly-boy," he said. He was coming towards me, spoon in hand. I braced myself and opened my mouth . . .

It was awful. And yet, I felt better for having taken it. Like Pa said, we were suffering together.

I will never catch any well trout out of anybody's well again.

GHOST-MINE GOLD



ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

THE STORY THUS FAR:

A FOOL'S quest for fool's gold—that's what every oldtimer in Sylvanite calls it when RIGDON SADAR turns up in town, during the Boom Days celebration, to search for a fortune in gold ore which his grandfather was suspected of stealing forty-five years before. But Sadar believes the gold is still in the abandoned tunnels of Sylvan Mountain. And before he starts his own mining venture with JOE TANNER, he is determined to prove old Sam Rigdon's innocence. But Tanner has set a deadline of one week for Sadar to find the stolen gold!

In Sylvanite, Sadar meets old man ROUVIERE, millionaire boss of the town, his daughter, JACKIE, and his manager, "BIFF" REEVES. In the Windlass Bucket, a bar owned by Reeves, he makes friends with DEEDEE DUCRAY, an old miner from whom he hopes to learn something that will help him locate the gold ore—and talks

By STEVE FRAZEE

Magnates, madams and visiting big-wigs were escorted into the vug to see the treasure.

with JACK RALSTON, who owns the Hibernian mine, next to the old Vivandiere, where the gold disappeared. Ducray takes Sadar to dinner at the Fire Horse Club, where he introduces him to several of the "boys," including SIM TARWATER who once worked at the Vivandiere. Later, Jackie Rouviere comes in with Reeves who starts an argument with Sadar. In the ensuing fight, Sadar knocks out Reeves. Jackie takes Reeves home. After their departure, BEN LIGGETT, who runs the Fire Horse Club, warns Sadar he'd be smart to leave town—and Sim Tarwater, once a friend of Sadar's grandfather, repeats Ben's warning. On the way back to his hotel, Sadar pauses underneath a street light. Something clangs against the metal post and falls to the ground nearby. Sadar picks up the missile which so nearly struck him. It is an arrow, the shaft of aluminum, the steel head ridged and tapered to a point of deadly sharpness . . .

PART II

GOLDEN sunlight lay heavy on Sylvan Mountain when Sadar came out of the Big Stope his second day in Sylvanite. He stood under the ring of burned-out carbide lamps hanging from the wagon wheel and looked at pinkish-white dumps spotted in almost straight lines up the aspen-covered slopes.

That he had been warned off twice; that someone had tried to drive an arrow through the soft parts from the dark last night made him sure that the highgrade was still around somewhere. He studied the slopes. Five hundred miles of workings up there. Ore must have been concentrated in a relatively small area, for, considering the number of dumps showing, five hundred miles of workings was not a great deal.

One day was gone. He had six more, six more to pinpoint, somehow, the exact spot where the highgrade lay in the gloomy depths of those crumbling mines. Thirty years of neglect. That was a long time. Sadar had been in mines where the groaning movement of ground necessitated replacement of timbers every month.

To make a stab at the mountain without a great deal of facts that he now lacked would be folly, as futile as prodding with a stick at prairie dog holes in an effort to determine if there was a marble down one of the burrows.

Right now he was going to see Reeves at the remodeled brothel behind the hotel, where Reeves recently had established new offices to direct the spending of Rouviere's money. Al Harris, the night desk clerk, had smiled hugely over the fact that Reeves either didn't know or had overlooked the original nature of his new offices.

He started around the corner.

Last night he had paralyzed Reeves' legs with those two solid raps under the center joining of the ribs and had dumped him outside the Fire Horse Club with Jackie Rouviere and the others watching. Then, on returning to the hotel a little more than an hour later, carrying the arrow that had almost cleaved his intestines, he had been given a polite note from Reeves requesting an interview this morning. "I'm sure you will be interested," the last line read.

Sadar smiled thinly. He was interested all right. Why, besides mayhem, would Reeves write a note like that only a short time after getting all the air and electricity knocked out of him?

Behind the Big Stope he passed the squares of a hideous formal garden where two men were working and saw across the street the mansion Harris had described. "It was a flourishing institution once," the clerk had said.

The desk clerk had been a great help. He was intelligent, had a quiet sense of humor and seemed to know what was going on about him. Besides, he seemed to dislike Reeves, an attitude that was beginning to attract Sadar to people who held it.

Harris hadn't been taken in entirely by Sadar's story last night about finding the arrow accidentally in the weeds, but he hadn't asked any questions. "It's a broadhead hunting arrow, one like Rouviere uses," he said. "Last year he had a hunting party that used nothing but bows and arrows. Got three deer, they did."

Mrs. Mahogany, who seemed to have no profession other than appearing suddenly in any given conversation around the lobby, crashed through center about them, scattering coherency as a large trout scatters minnows. She had a long story about a distant relative who could outshoot Robin Hood, but allowed drinking to ruin his career. During pauses to check her air gauges, Sadar managed to find out that Jack Ralston, then on good terms with Rouviere, had been a member of the archer's party the year before.

In three bounds Sadar went up ten long steps to the porch. He cocked one eye at repainted gingerbread around the outside edges of the porch, read a small, conservative sign that said: *Use This Door,* and went inside.

CHAPTER V

TREASURE HUNT

HE CAME up short against a receptionist's desk, where sat the girl who had been handing lamps to Jackie Rouviere the night before. She recognized him and smiled. "Your beard! You shaved it off!"

"It got full of Lesser Aleutian Shovelnose Dig-Digs," he said, and took in the room.

Two girls were working at typewriters. At the back of the room, behind a desk large enough to stow ten cases of .50 caliber ammunition, sat the long-jawed man who had been with Reeves in the Fire Horse Club last night. At a much smaller desk another man was talking to a well-dressed middle-aged couple. Sadar heard him say, "Now, we have some very desirable old places that can be remodeled easily."

Uh-huh, Sadar thought; this outfit probably slipped in quietly before they got the boom started and grabbed up the best of the old houses.

The long-jawed man saw Sadar, got up and crossed the room quickly. He held open a gate in the low partition. "Come right in, Mr. Sadar. I'll see if Mr. Reeves is busy."

"Thanks," Sadar said. He followed the man. Salmon Jaw was right. The guy could swim right along with male salmon and never be asked for credentials.

Sadar waited at the huge desk while the secretary went through a high-paneled door. He listened shamelessly and attentively, but no sounds came through. Then Salmon Jaw came back, smiled and waved him inside.

Reeves' dark oak desk was more massive than the large one in the outer office. At his back a large bay window with venetian blinds poured light on wallpaper with wide stripes of bilious blue and hangover yellow. One end of the room was nicked by a tiny marble-faced fireplace, just right for burning old letters. There was a shortage of chintz and mirrors and the venetian blinds were as prominent as an outhouse in the front yard, but on the whole, Sadar thought, there might be some Victorian atmosphere in the joint—if one knew where to look for it.

Reeves waved at a red plush chair. "First off, I want to say I'm sorry about that little unpleasantness last night."

Sadar sat down. He saw no mark from his one head blow on the other's face. It probably was under those clinched red whiskers. Holy mackerel! It looked like Reeves had oil on his beard! He restrained himself from feeling his own cheekbone, conscious that Reeves was looking at it.

"O.K., it was all a sad mistake," Sadar said. He studied the other's face. Its expression was bland enough, but there still lurked in the wide-set, reddish-brown eyes evidence that Reeves was offering the peace pipe for purposes of revenue only.

Reeves leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his neck. "Our guests usually don't arrive the way you did yesterday. That caused me to look your name up. Simply curiosity, no more. After our little trouble, Pete Dill—that's my Number One boy in the outer office—got you placed."

"That so?"

"You were first in the downhill at Little Cottonwood this spring. You took second in the jump at Steamboat before that, first on the Monarch Run and twisted your knee just before the trials at Hillcrest. That right?"

Sadar nodded.

"Pete is a good man for names and facts." Reeves was pleased with himself. "That's why I hired him," he added, as if diverting too much credit.

"What's the pitch, Reeves?"

Reeves unclasped his hands and leaned forward. "I'd like to hire you for our ski instructor here next winter."

"That's a long time."

"I mean now," Reeves said.

"Dry runs on soap chips?"

"I can find something for you to do till winter."

"Such as carrying in bags for hotel guests?"

"Hardly that!" Reeves shook his head

impatiently. "After all, P.T.F.—" he used the initials with elaborate carelessness—"leaves a great deal to my discretion." His eyes were on Sadar's bruised cheekbone. "I'm sure we can work together all right, no matter how badly we got started last night," Reeves said. He watched Sadar keenly. "What do you think?"

I think you're a louse and you could be the guy who cut loose an arrow at me last night, Sadar thought. You're working around to something under cover of that ski gag. If Salmon Jaw is such a whiz at names and facts he probably knew who I am.

"Well . . . " Sadar stalled, trying to guess how deep Reeves was playing. No doubt the man knew he was Sam Rigdon's grandson and was sure he was after the calaverite. Did Reeves know anything about it, or was he trying to angle in, believing that Sadar was trying to check his dope against what Sadar was supposed to know.

Sadar decided to go along.

"What's your deal?" he asked.

Reeves smiled with the air of a man who has set the hook solidly. "The first thing I have in mind is our vug treasure hunt. That's a little—" He looked toward the door as it opened noiselessly. "Yes, Pete?"

Dill's long jaw moved up and down. "Jackie," he said.

Annoyance came instantly to Reeves' face. He recovered quickly and smiled. "Send her right in."

SHE was wearing jodhpurs, a fringed buckskin jacket and a wide-brimmed black Mormon hat with a leather chin thong. Sadar's first impression was that it was a hell of a get-up, but he took a closer look, observing particularly the way she filled the garments and revised his opinion.

Jackie looked from one man to the other. "All areas of disagreement explored and conquered, I see."

Reeves laughed easily. "Yes, everything is ironed out. I'm hoping to hire Sadar as our ski instructor. In the meantime I want to hold him here to make sure we have him next winter."

Jackie looked from face to face and said nothing.

"Sadar's first job could be to hide the sack for the treasure hunt, don't you think, Jackie?" Reeves said. "We keep his hiring a secret, of course, so he won't be trailed by a mob the way I was last year." He turned to Sadar without waiting for an answer. "The vug hunt is a little attraction I started last year. We hide a sack of gold. On the last day of the celebration we print the clues, sort of like that radio identity program, you know. Of course, you can appreciate the terrific background of publicity we have ready-made."

"Sure," Sadar said, watching from the corner of his eye the cool way Jackie was studying both him and Reeves.

"How does it sound, Jackie?" Reeves asked.

"I couldn't think of a better man for the job," the girl said. "But that won't keep him busy till skiing season."

Sadar explored her face for sarcasm, tried vainly to recapture her tone and examine it for an insinuation.

"Oh, I'll find other things to do with him," Reeves said. "Those who work for me generally earn their money."

Sadar had an urge to walk out.

"I imagine," Jackie said. "Excuse me for barging in right in the middle of things. I just wanted to remind you not to forget that we're going riding today."

She went out as briskly as she'd entered.

Reeves appeared to be relieved.

"Last year you've no idea of the number of people who came swarming to hunt that treasure," he said. "Too many were undesirables, the camping-out class, you might say; so this year I've altered the procedure. Only those registered at the hotel, or living in one of our cabins, or those buying twenty-five dollars' worth of checks at the Poker Festival will be given the clues. That will eliminate a large part of the non-spenders who come here just to hunt the treasure." He pursed his lips as if considering something distasteful. "Of course, we can't keep them away entirely."

Sadar squirmed in disgust.

"Naturally, we don't hide gold," Reeves said. "Just a sack with a chit redeemable for the amount."

Sadar nodded. The whole deal was as stagy as Reeves' efforts to cover his real motive in bringing Sadar to the office.

"You haven't given me an answer yet," Reeves said. "What do you say, do you want to work with me?" He named a salary figure considerably out of line with the nature of the summer employment. "Of course, there may be other considerations later," he added significantly.

"What do you know about twenty-seven sacks of calaverite?" Sadar asked.

The abrupt question didn't startle Reeves. His expression was at once crafty and greedy. "Did I even mention anything about that?"

"What do you know about it?"

Reeves smiled. "Well let's not get hasty. One thing at a time. You haven't answered my question about going to work."

Sadar considered several angles. Reeves didn't know anything about the high-grade, perhaps; or maybe he knew plenty. It could be a ludicrous situation they were getting into, each playing the other for information that neither possessed. But time was short. Sadar had to work any angle that even looked like a bare chance.

"I'll take the job," he said.

"Fine!" Reeves shook cigarettes from a pack on the desk.

They lit up and measured each other.

"Is it true that Jack Ralston went sour on Rouviere because Rouviere wouldn't help him open the Hibernian?" Sadar asked.

Reeves nodded. "The Hibernian is a poor bet."

"From what standpoint?"

"Mining. It was worked out years ago."

"You have any maps of the levels on the Vivandiere? Sadar asked.

"All of them—here in the office." Reeves' eyes were steady.

"I'd like to see them."

"Later. After we work out certain agreements. How do I know you—"

The door to the outer office opened quietly and Dill stepped in. "Mr. Rouviere is at the real estate desk," he said quietly, holding the door closed behind him.

Reeves got up quickly. "All right, Pete." He turned to Sadar. "Well, I suppose you'll want to get started looking for a place to hide the sack." He went across the room and opened a door that led to the porch. "Let me know how things start to stack up. Take your time, look around. I imagine you'll want to familiarize yourself with—ah—landmarks and such. No hurry, you know."

"No hurry. I've got almost a week."

Sadar went out where the air was warm and clean.

HE stood on the porch several moments looking at Sylvan Mountain. Somewhere up there was the end of the old trail, a trail that Reeves, too, was trying to follow, without Rouviere's knowledge.

Across the street Jackie was watching the two men working in the formal gardens. In a graveled driveway sat a red jeep with a cub bear chained in the back seat. Sadar went across the street.

The cub whimpered, raked air with its forepaws and nuzzled Sadar's hand when he stopped by the jeep. He turned the furry little brute around twice to unfoul the chain fastened to its collar, and scratched the animal's neck.

Jackie walked over. "You like Biff-Biff?"

"I took the job."

She laughed. "I mean the bear. We named him after Reeves."

Sadar grinned. "I'll bet Reeves appreciated that!"

"He actually did."

They looked at each other and laughed.

"So you're going to hide the sack for the treasure hunt. Rumor sayeth you're well qualified by heredity for the job."

Sadar's face darkened. "Rumor is a damn liar!"

She looked at him keenly. "Sorry. I didn't realize how touchy you might be. I think I'm beginning to understand a thing or two."

"I'm not. How come you know I'm Sam Rigdon's grandson?"

"Good Lord! With that beard you had I thought you were *trying* to look like your grandfather's picture with the fire laddies."

The oldtimers had recognized him instantly; this girl had placed him from his likeness to the picture of his grandfather; and Pete Dill had used his memory of facts and names to come up with his identity. He couldn't have done any worse by arriving in a green fire truck and announcing his mission over a public address system.

"You didn't come into the office just to remind Reeves about that riding date," Sadar said.

"No. Frankly, I was curious about Biff's wanting to see you. After all, you know, he doesn't have any reasons for liking you."

"Do you know why he wanted to see me?"

"I can guess his real reason. You didn't think Sam Rigdon's grandson was coming to Sylvanite without people being sure he had a secret map to that vug kitty, did you?"

"If I did, I've shuffled the deck again." He studied her face. "Why should that old robbery suddenly get a lot of hot attention after all these years?"

"Maybe because Biff used it as capital in his treasure hunt publicity; maybe because my father talked some of reopening the Vivandiere; mainly because you're here."

"Did your father seriously consider opening the Vivandiere to look for the calaverite?" Sadar asked.

She patted the cub. "He considered it and decided against it."

"And Ralston thinks it's in the Hibernian?"

She nodded. "I think he does. If it's still in the mountain he may not be so silly as some people think. The two mines lie side by side for six thousand feet and they were inter-connected on almost every level. Perhaps Ralston knows something that nobody else does."

She seems to have made somewhat of a study of things in relation to that high-grade, Sadar thought. He disengaged Biff-Biff's sharp little teeth from his jacket sleeve, and unconsciously looked toward the mountain. This deal might become a little involved, what with everybody trying to get into the act. The highgrade legally belonged to Rouviere, no matter where found, but if anyone else besides Sadar or Rouviere himself found the cache, legality would probably get scant consideration, no more consideration than the hidden archer had showed last night.

"Al Harris tells me you kill deer around here with bow and arrows," Sadar said.

Jackie looked at him curiously. "What brought that up so abruptly?"

"It was just an idle thought."

"My father promoted a party last year. This year he's trying to get an area set aside for bow and arrow hunting only." She smiled. "I got one of the deer myself in that party last season."

"I thought it took a lot of power to bend one of those hunting bows."

"I'm no weakling, exactly. I was lucky, too."

"How'd Ralston do?"

"He wasn't much interested, except to talk mining to Dad. I think that's the only reason he went along."

"How about Reeves? Did he get a deer?"

"No, Mr. D. A. Reeves didn't go. He just shoots a little on the range here."

"Where'd Reeves go after our trouble last night?"

"He stopped at the Windlass Bucket. Business, you know. He owns the place."

Sadar playfully shoved the cub's head back as it leaned from the jeep to gnaw at the spare tire. "Did anyone ever tell you a bear belongs in the woods?"

"I'm finding it out. He was busy tearing the upholstery out of my car last night while you and Biff were trying the same on each other."

Sadar grinned. "You seem to get along all right with the Fire Horse boys."

"That's right, I do."

He decided to plunge a little. "How come your father puts up with a man like Reeves?"

She gave him a cool look, became reserved instantly. "That is my father's business, Mr. Sadar." She got into the jeep, started the motor and went down the driveway. Sadar ducked gravel as the vehicle toed in.

Hmm. Pretty touchy about her father, Sadar thought. Well, he was a trifle hair-trigger about his grandfather.

CHAPTER VI

PAY DIRT

THE office of the *Sylvanite Times*, two blocks down Main Street from the Big Stope, was not quite what Sadar had expected. Bright, blue-tinted windows looked out on Sylvan Mountain. The floor in front of a linoleum-topped counter was clean. He saw a modern-looking vertical press just forward of an ancient

flat-bed. Recalling Joe Tanner's moans about the expense of legal notices to clear title to land, Sadar guessed that the *Times* hadn't suffered from the property boom in Sylvanite.

The gray-haired man who greeted him across the counter was fat-jowled, clear-eyed and looked like a fellow who knew his way around.

"Old files? Sure! Just treat 'em gently, will you?" He studied Sadar shrewdly. "Something in particular you want?"

"That is my father's business, Mr. Sadar," Jackie said. She got into the jeep and started the motor.

"Yep! I'm looking for the story of the vug robbery here forty-five years ago."

The man's eyes played over Sadar's face keenly. "It's all in the files, son. Every word on it." He turned to shout to a blond lad who was squatting by a type case in the rear of the plant. "Show him where the old files are, Tommy! Better search him for a pocketknife and scissors, too!" he added with a grin.

Tommy had an almost-new high school class ring and a crew haircut. He measured Sadar's big frame with the candid appraisal of one young animal seeing outstanding physical qualities in another. "Those old papers are pretty dull," he warned.

And so they were, until Sadar gradually began to get the feel of times that would not come again. At first the ads were the only lucid contents in pages of wandering, editorializing stories that attacked

national politicians he had never heard of, or announcing amazing strikes on every level of every mine on Sylvan Mountain. His interest began to pick up when he encountered his grandparents' names in social items.

He struck a million dollars' worth of pay dirt in a file that held the second half of a long-gone year. *Million Dollar Vug!!* a modest, one-column headline declared. He waded through the opinions of mining experts who explained that vugs were chambers left in solid formations by terrible gas pressures when the earth's crust was in a cooling state. Then he got to the specific million-dollar vug on the fourth level of the Vivandiere, eighteen hundred feet in, seven hundred and fifty feet below the surface, according to Superintendent Samuel T. Rigdon.

Who was authority for the statement that the incredibly rich calaverite lining the vug walls and lying on the floor was worth a million dollars was a matter between the editor and his conscience. Sadar read on, wading through conjecture, Latin proverbs and synonyms of "astounding," gleaning facts slowly midst flowery flights.

The vug was rich. Sim Tarwater, night shift boss on that level, "a gentleman not customarily given to over-statement or excessive verbiage of oral expression," admitted cautiously that he had "never seen the likes before." It was on Sim's shift that a Sullivan operator and his chuck tender, driving a crosscut toward the Hibernian sideline, and "little dreaming of the remarkable discovery they were on the verge of consummating," became puzzled when a three-foot length of steel rattled through "into thin and empty space."

They decided they had broken into an old stope of the Hibernian, and the driller sent his helper for Sim Tarwater, who ordered the hole shot lightly. He went back into sickening powder smoke soon afterward and discovered the shot had broken an opening into a small chamber where calaverite lay "as jewels in the strong room of an Oriental potentate." Sim stood guard and sent the driller to wake Sam Rigdon. Rigdon looked, swore and sent Sim Tarwater to rouse Marcus Besse, owner of the Vivandiere. Besse looked, scooped and lapsed into French for ten minutes.

"While the astounded drilling crew under Mr. Tarwater's direction enlarged the vug opening, a brand-new vault door, then in the freight yards, was diverted from its destination at the new courthouse, whisked up the mountain, and before the first tiny flush of dawn had touched the sylvan green of the slopes, this formidable barrier of the finest modern steel was concreted in place at the vug entrance."

In the next issue the paper increased its estimate of the vug treasure by two hundred thousand dollars and took a tolerant attitude toward the fact that everyone, in the haste attendant upon placing the vault door, had forgotten to inquire what, if any, was the combination to the lock. Several telegrams to St. Louis settled that matter. In no time at all Marcus Besse was making a showplace of the vug.

AS he scanned the brittle pages Sadar walked with Besse and Sam Rigdon along the main drift of Vivandiere Number Four, entered a crosscut where Sim Tarwater and another trusted employee put in twelve-hour shifts to see that no unauthorized persons got near the vault door, waited while either Besse or Rigdon opened the steel barrier, and stared at natural wealth in one of nature's richest storerooms.

He was an invisible, detached spectator in the vug while hundreds came to look. Marcus Besse was in his glory. To many, especially ladies, the Frenchman gave pieces of calaverite as souvenirs. He had a high-backed horsehair chair installed for the use of delicate visitors suddenly overcome from the sight of so much wealth. Sometimes, when visitors were few, he sat in it himself, staring for long periods at the highgrade.

Not everyone was allowed to see the treasure, especially persons such as a notorious brothel character who was stopped in the dryroom and divested of, not one, but three highgrader's belts before being sent on his way.

Magnates, madams and visiting big-wigs were escorted past faithful Sim Tarwater by either Rigdon or Besse. A touring English nobleman almost lost composure at sight of the calaverite. "Amazing!" he said. "Really amazing!"

A learned geologist inquired nervously of the probability of cave-ins. He shivered in the cold, sat down in the horsehair throne and began an abstruse lecture on the cleavage of tellurium ores. A reigning madam, her finery hidden under a stiff slicker, listened only briefly. "That may be true, professor," she allowed, "but my business will outlast this little pile of shiny rock."

For ten days the vug was a showroom. Then Besse announced a date when the calaverite would be taken to the surface. Gamblers ran pools on the amount of final settlement. A literary society ran a sweepstakes to raise funds to bring an opera singer to Sylvanite. Mrs. Samuel T. Rigdon approved the project as "most worthwhile."

On the day set for the removal of the treasure, which had been sacked the night before, Besse, Rigdon and Tarwater went to the vug with five selected miners, all relatives of Besse. Guards were thick at the Number Four portal. Sightseers were swarming around the mine as close as they were allowed to come. A drunk fell into an old prospect hole and broke his leg. The crews of two light engines supposed to be on their way to the Evening Star mine, delayed their trip for two hours to see the highgrade removed, while the superintendent of the Evening Star, all cars on his siding filled and his bins overflowing, swore he'd sue the hell out of the railroad.

Besse's plan was to take the calaverite to the main drift of Number Four, down a raise to Number Five level and bring it to sunlight at Five portal. Guards were not so much in evidence there, but just as numerous as around the upper level. The owner's choosing of this roundabout route was a precaution brought about by the rumor that an unusually bold gang of holdups were planning to create a diversion by blowing up a large store of flour on the hillside. Under cover of the cloud of milled wheat the holdups were going to seize the calaverite and escape on fast horses to a mountain hideout.

The story was a credit to somebody's imagination, though some credence could be taken from the fact that two boxes of dynamite and four sacks of flour had been found near the Number Four portal. Sam Rigdon pointed out that the powder had been cached, undoubtedly, by some teamster on a freight haul to mines farther up the mountain, it being a common practice of skinners to steal at least two boxes from every load of dynamite they hauled, for sale to prospectors at reduced rates.

The flour, Rigdon said, had been there for some time, so long that dampness had spoiled it and run the printing on the sacks. It had been stolen, investigation tended to show, from the wagon of a teamster hauling supplies to a boarding house at the Glory Me tunnel. The skinner had left his team unattended one day to stagger off to a nearby spring. The unfamiliar liquid had left him somewhat indisposed for ten or fifteen minutes, and someone had taken advantage of his sad condition to loot the wagon of the flour, caching it for recovery later. Rain that day had ruined it, so the unknown party or parties had not bothered to recover the wheat.

So Sam Rigdon theorized.

Besse may not have believed the fantastic story of the plot, but he was cautious and wanted to take no chances. Eighteen hundred feet in, seven hundred and fifty feet down, behind steel, with men on guard, the calaverite had been safe enough. Bringing it to daylight was something else. Sacks of country rock were to be taken from the Number Four portal as a ruse, while the real wealth was being lowered to Five level, for less conspicuous removal.

The plan was sensible and a credit to Besse's Auvergne ancestry.

Just one hitch developed.

When Besse and his party entered the vug the twenty-seven sacks were gone. The thieves had left nothing but the high-backed chair.

FROM the vug a small opening led to an abandoned stope in the Hibernian, just ten feet away. Besse went wild. He invoked curses on the thieves; on the owner of the Hibernian, Theodore Ralston; on highgraders in general and their ancestors; on Sam Rigdon for not knowing exactly how close to that old stope the vug was; and on himself for leaving the calaverite underground any longer than it would have taken to sack it and get it to safety.

Those charged with taking the fake ore out went about their business on schedule, not knowing the vug had been looted. The crowd outside saw the sacks hustled into spring wagons and whisked away under heavy guard. They were satisfied. Having counted twenty-seven sacks, observing, too, that their weights seemed considerable above average for calaverite, sightseers increased their estimate of the treasure's value by varying amounts.

The spring wagons raised a dust cloud as they went toward the Sylvanite State Bank. Sightseers drifted away. The two engine crews made their belated run up to the Evening Star and cursed the superintendent as heartily as he damned them.

Everything returned to normal.

Except inside the vug, where Marcus Besse sat on his horsehair chair, tears bright in the candlelight. Then he rose and began to curse again.

Two days later Pinkerton men mingled with miners in bars and brothels. Some were employed at the Vivandiere, on Level Four; two were working at the Hibernian, with Theodore Ralston's approval, Besse having decided when he cooled down that Ralston had nothing to do with the robbery, but that some of his outlaw miners certainly had. If the detectives found out anything definite, no public announcement was ever made.

Marcus Besse sat on the horsehair chair, tears bright in the candlelight.

Two theories sprang up. One held that the sacks had been taken by Hibernian miners who had been smart enough to realize how close the vug lay to that abandoned stope. After the vug was first uncovered there had been plenty of time to run a narrow ten-foot drift to tap it. The other main group contended that the passage had been made by Vivandiere miners *from* the vug *to* the stope, with the full knowledge of Sam Rigdon and Sim Tarwater, Rigdon being the only man besides Besse who knew the combination to the vault lock. These theorists held that the drift was a blind to throw suspicion on the Hibernian, that the passage had been made on three successive night shifts by Vivandiere miners, who cleverly sealed their work with rock and talc after each operation.

Those who had never been underground agreed, unaware that even a half-baked miner would have detected something amiss in the appearance of the wall; but even smarter men admitted cautiously that there could be something to the story—after they learned that Besse's high-backed chair had always sat against the end of the vug where the tiny drift opened.

Still others, confusing cause and effect with the sure fumbling of stupidity, declared that Besse had stolen the highgrade from himself. This, Besse raged, was the unkindest cut of all. Any man who would try to fool innocent bystanders with country rock in sacks would do anything, his detractors shouted.

On the whole, everyone conceded that the calaverite was gone.

Veteran miners could not agree when they tried to determine from which direction the tunnel had been run. All drill holes had been picked out carefully, or else the loose nature of the gangue material had sloughed to leave no marks. Water in the old stope reached a four-

foot depth in the upper end, where the walls had caved to form a block; running almost to the stope end of the little drift, that pool had received muck from the passage, if the tunnel had been made *from* the stope to the vug. Whether the muck under that water was fresh or not was hard to say, especially after miners attempting to drain the pool away brought down fresh material from the stope walls by accident.

If the drift had been made *from* the vug to the stope, resultant muck could have been carried past conniving Tarwater, sack by sack. A good many hard-headed people pointed out that it would have been just as easy to carry the calaverite out the same way, without going to all the trouble of running an opening to the stope in order to divert suspicion.

Short-handled tools left in the stope proved nothing, though the detectives pawed over them and scowled thoughtfully.

Sim Tarwater said that he had heard light shots which seemed to come from the direction of the vug when he was on night guard duty in the crosscut just off the main drift, and had reported them to Sam Rigdon. Besse admitted that Rigdon had mentioned Sim's uneasiness over the sounds, but that he himself had dismissed them as coming from other parts of the Vivandiere, since Tarwater said they coincided with the usual blasting time in the Vivandiere.

The last shots that Tarwater had heard, he recalled as coming two or three hours before time for the graveyard shift to come on—*the evening before the robbery was discovered.*

Assuming that those last shots marked the time the thieves actually reached the vug, Besse pointed out that the culprits couldn't have had time to carry the sacks out of the Hibernian. To do so they would have been forced to travel by difficult, little-used routes to avoid detection in the mine; and then they would have had to face a highgrade checking system at any portal they tried on the Hibernian. The same highgrade checks prevailed on every level of the Vivandiere, assuming that the thieves had gone from the Hibernian *back into* the Vivandiere by any one of the numerous inter-connecting crosscuts, he was careful to add.

Mines on either side of the Hibernian and Vivandiere were also connected by workings, and some of those mines didn't have rigid checking systems at the portals. But Besse pointed out a hard fact to get around: twenty-seven sacks of ore was a lot of weight to carry up raises and through old stopes to reach the surface at some distant point, always assuming that there had been only two or three hours' time to do so.

Timekeepers' records at every portal on both mines showed that no miner had been late coming off the shift.

The writer introduced his own theory. Tarwater, he said, could have been mistaken about the shots. The thieves might have had a whole shift to move the sacks, and might have carried their loot out of an opening a long way from either mine. It was possible for a miner who knew the honey-combed mountain well to have gone mile on mile underground.

A Cousin Jack veteran proved that. He entered the Dolly shaft, one half mile from Sylvanite, and six hours later emerged at the Digman mine three miles away. His act proved something, but not where the calaverite was.

Before the robbery dwindled to nothing in the newspapers Besse offered a ten thousand dollar reward for information leading to conviction of the thieves and the same amount for information leading to recovery of the sacks. He repeated that he was convinced the highgrade was still underground and added that, "as president of the Mine Operators' Association, I have the backing to say that from now on very stringent checks will prevail."

Ten weeks after the robbery Marcus Besse announced the resignations of Samuel T. Rigdon and Sim Tarwater.

"Mr. Besse wishes to state emphatically that no shadow of culpability attaches to the two employees, that they leave of their own volition. Mr. Besse personally minimizes the degree of negligence involved. . ."

Two weeks later Sadar's mother was born and his grandmother was dead.

HE CLOSED the file and put it back on the shelf where other dead years rested quietly. He came back to the present slowly, as a man waking to unfamiliar surround-

ings. The blond printer was sorting material from a wrecked form. A small, gray-headed woman had joined the staff and was typing fast and rhythmically at a desk near the front. The owner was talking across the counter to a farmer who wanted No Hunting and Fishing signs.

Sadar looked up the mountain. Waste-piles blotched against the green looked weathered and hard; old mine buildings seemed to slump and show their age. The spell he'd built while reading had been binding and vivid. But this was today. He walked toward the door.

"Find out what you wanted?" the editor asked.

Sadar nodded. "Thanks."

The editor laughed. "You did better than old Besse then!"

Sadar stood outside, looking at Sylvan Mountain. *No culpability . . . Mr. Besse minimizes negligence . . .* Negligence! He scowled at the line of dumps. The old army game. Someone had to take the rap. Now Sim Tarwater had a haunted, restless look; and from his grandfather Sadar had inherited all the gnawing unfairness of a lie. He could fully understand the reasons for his grandfather's savage burst of temper when the subject of the robbery had first come up; he knew now why the old man didn't care to talk about it.

It was more important than ever that he find the calaverite. And the task looked much harder.

He went over his experiences since coming to Sylvanite. The person who had loosed the arrow no doubt was the person who knew most about the highgrade. Deedee? Deedee had been in bed with a crippled hip; anyway, the thought of that brown-eyed old man skulking in the dark with a bow didn't fit. Ben didn't fit, either. He'd warned Sadar. Why should he follow that warning up by trying to kill him soon afterward? Ralston was bitter and hard and had a violent temper, but Ralston was interested in the Hibernian. He owned it, and could control any efforts, beyond useless prowling, to search the Hibernian for the calaverite. Besides, he didn't even know who Sadar was, not last night, at least.

Jackie could bend a mean bow, but she was a woman. He realized his thinking there was illogical, but still he couldn't see her trying to kill him. Rouviere wasn't the kind who had to skulk around in the dark, even if he'd wanted Sadar killed. Sim Tarwater? No, Sim hadn't had his bow and arrows when Sadar saw him shortly before the aluminum tube came whispering from the dark to clang against the lamp post.

To give the devil his due credit, Sadar didn't think Reeves, as much of a crooked stinker as the red-bearded man might be, was the kind who would resort to a sneak trick to kill someone. Reeves' methods would be to chisel in, just as he had tried to do in his underhanded conversation this morning.

Sadar frowned. Standing there in bright sunlight he couldn't readily believe that any of the people he'd met in Sylvanite would try to kill him.

And yet someone had.

He went back and had another look at the bright nick on the lamp post. He crossed the fence that had tripped him and looked at the weeds between the two buildings where the archer had stood. Broken stalks and wilting leaves proved no more than he already knew. There was more evidence of the person's flight among rank weeds in the alley.

Sadar left the scene not even mildly disappointed. He hadn't expected to find anything in the first place. Impatience was growing in him, a nervous urge for action. He wanted to start prowling the mountain and the old mines, even as he forced himself to acknowledge that such a course would be the least productive he could follow.

No, the way to find those twenty-seven sacks was not to begin aimless exploring of five hundred miles of abandoned workings; at least not until he had exhausted his chances of learning as much as he could in Sylvanite.

But time was passing.

Old Charley had just finished servicing a car as Sadar approached. The old man wiped his hands on striped blue ticking, jammed the rag toward his hip pocket and went unerringly toward his broken-springed throne. His squint at Sadar was exactly the same as when he'd first seen him the night before.

Sadar grinned. "I came back to talk some more about Delmonico's menus."

"By gum! The Alaska boy! I knowed

you—and yet I didn't! No beard makes a big difference. Funny thing about hair . . ." He dived into a story about a bald-headed bartender in Tincup, who had grown a mane of jet-black hair when sixty-five. "He saved the leavin's in whiskey glasses and rubbed 'em on his head three, four times a day."

"I didn't know anybody in those days ever left any whiskey in a glass."

Charley cackled. "They left plenty of *that* fellow's liquor!" He studied Sadar for several moments. "I shoulda knowed you were Sam Rigdon's boy—grandson."

The news was traveling fast enough, Sadar thought. Charley winked confidentially. "Guess you know what folks are saying?"

"I can guess. Well, they're right. I'm digging up the loot tonight."

Charley laughed. "That's pretty good!" He squinted and leaned forward. "Never was no robbery, you know."

"No?"

"Mark my words, Young Sam—" his fist went up and down on a spring—"that ore went to the smelter right enough—only it ran so damn low that old Besse was ashamed of all the show he'd made of things, so he just faked the robbery to cover up being a jackass." Charley let his last dozen words out rapidly.

"Why did my grandfather quit, if that's true?"

"He got sore at Besse and wanted to tell the truth. So Besse just up and fired him. Then he fired Sim because he stuck up for Sam."

Sadar started up the street toward the Windlass Bucket. "You might be right, Charley," he said.

"I mean I'm right!" Charley tangled his hip pocket in a broken spring and began to curse. "Dang seat! It ought to be fixed sometime!"

"Mark my words, Young Sam—old Besse just faked the robbery to cover up being a jackass."

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE HIGHGRADE HELL

THE Windlass Bucket was crowded. Bright shirts, big hats, a few imitation prospectors in boots and derbies . . . A good many sober citizens trying to catch a quick meal or a quick drink. . . . At one end of the bar a woman with an upswept hairdo and a rusty-looking silk gown with an enormous bustle was wailing, "She's only a birr-rd in a gilded cage! Just a birr-rd in a gi-hill-ded ca-hage!"

Sadar felt the same way until he spied Ralston sitting at a deuce table against the wall. He pulled out the second chair and sat down. "Hope you don't mind, Ralston." Sadar looked around the room and grinned. "Sort of noisy, but colorful in a way."

"It stinks," Ralston said. He studied Sadar for several moments. "Been up the hill?"

"Yep! I went up to see if the calaverite was where my grandpop said. It was; so tonight I'm going south with it."

Ralston's sneer came readily. It was on the surface anyway, and merely had to deepen a little. "Let me know what time and I'll furnish you a truck free."

Sadar grinned. "It's a deal." He studied Ralston a moment, deciding that there was something deeply defensive in the man. "Your boy Charley tells me old Marcus Besse never really was robbed."

"Charley had his interpretation of everything, including a theory that changing oil in a motor is a waste of money."

Ralston grimaced in disgust as the singer began her version of "Frankie and Johnny." "That vug was tapped, never fear. But the stuff went through some crooked assay office a long, long time ago, and what *they* didn't knock down soon went for women and whiskey before you and I were born. The gold is buried all right—at Fort Knox."

"I suppose so," Sadar said.

They gave their orders to a harried waitress, who kept looking back over her shoulder as if she had forgotten something.

"You own the Hibernian by yourself?" Sadar asked.

Ralston nodded.

"What will you take for it?"

Ralston reacted much harder than Sadar had expected. His eyelids shot up and his lips half parted. Then his jaw hardened and his green eyes grew luminescent with anger. "It's not for sale at any price!"

Sadar shrugged.

Ralston's voice started to rise. "Did Rouviere send you to buy it for him?"

"No."

"You were in Reeves' office this morning. By God! He's cooking up a deal. Why that dirty—"

"Take it easy," Sadar said.

Ralston subsided, but he continued to study Sadar angrily.

The singer had a straight shot, cleared her throat and began a rollicking song of "the days of old, the days of gold . . ."

They ate in silence, Ralston giving sullen attention to his plate. After lunch they parted in silence at the cashier's register, Ralston giving Sadar a last glance compounded of malevolence leavened with a big dab of suspicion. The garageman started to say something, then walked out abruptly.

In the Fire Horse Club Sadar heard the poker game going on in the casino and found Ben Liggett sitting at the long table in the barroom, reading a copy of the *Sylvanite Times*. In daylight Ben's brown face seemed less solemn, his dark eyes more expressive. His voice was no less sepulchral as he thrust the paper toward Sadar. "Guess you never seen this."

Sadar took the paper and sat down. The copy was a few days less than a year old, and the entire front page was devoted to the very matter he had spent three hours looking up in old files that morning. Sam Rigdon and Marcus Besse were shown in two dark pictures. The whole east face of Sylvan Mountain was there in a still darker picture, under the question: *Does A Stolen Fortune Still Lie Here?*

He skimmed through the columns. The story was substantially the same as he had dug from the files, although shot full of glamor and romance. The whole page was a clever publicity build-up for Reeves' treasure hunt. He tossed the paper on the table, wondering why Ben had gone to all the trouble to dig up the copy.

"It doesn't say very much about Sim Tarwater," Sadar said.

Ben nodded slowly. "Reeves himself went up to see Sim and get a big yarn. I happened to be there. Sim told Reeves if there was one dirty crack about him that Reeves and the newspaper wouldn't be there the day after it come out. It was the first time in about forty-five years I ever heard Sim say a harsh word. It was enough to chill the red-hot blood in you, believe me!"

Sadar's mind went back to little Sim's dark hatchet face with the strangely uneasy eyes. "What the story about Sim—after the robbery?"

Ben rested the calf of one leg on the corner of the table. Dried mud was caked on his shoe, Sadar saw. Fine, dry drilling mud.

"The vug business is what touched things off. Sim was pretty bitter about being canned, of course, and no mine would hire him. The owners clamped down so hard on high-grading that no one could make a decent living at it." Ben didn't smile when Sadar grinned. "One night at exactly three o'clock the owners had fourteen crooked assay offices blowed sky-high. Looking at it now, I can see the owners had plenty on their side. Them offices handled most of the highgrade swiped; some of 'em was baby smelters. They could run a quarter ton of stuff in twenty-four hours. Did it too."

FAR MORE vividly than the yellowed files, the glint in Ben's slate eyes and the thick vibrancy of his voice took Sadar back forty-five years.

"Sim's brother lived next to one of them

offices, and a piece of furnace come down through the roof and killed him in bed. That made Sim pretty near a madman. The miners were sore about the assay offices and a few other things the owners done. They put in California rounds; they figured out ways to beat the highgrade checks. One thing led to another. Sim was right in the middle of all the trouble. The owners brought in thugs when the governor wouldn't send the militia in."

Ben put his other leg atop the first and stared at the panorama of Sylvanite.

"The miners went out. The owners brought in more toughs and thugs. In all eleven miners got killed in the trouble that came after that. Five of 'em was from the Hibernian. Like everybody else I always figured those five were men the detectives figured had robbed the vug, and that the owners took the cover of the trouble to have 'em fixed."

Ben's voice was large in the long room.

"Then the miners got two boxes of dynamite under a barracks where the toughs lived. Some say Sim planted both of 'em, but it wasn't him. He was on the other end of one of the battery boxes when the time come to let 'er go. There was two leads from the powder. One of 'em, the one that went to Sim's detonator, got busted in the dark. He jammed the plunger just as the second man pushed his. The barracks went up and nineteen toughs went to hell. There was fifty or more in the hospital and eight or nine of them died, too."

Ben studied his hands for several moments. Sounds of the poker game came clearly.

"Sim went a little simple. He never would believe his lead was busted that night; still don't, as near as I can figure. He swore he'd blowed those men up, not that he didn't intend to right enough, but after he saw parts of bodies with boards clean through 'em and heard the groaning and screaming, he almost lost his senses. He wanted to give himself up, but the miners couldn't let him do that. They hid him for week up on Lost Man Creek before he began to come around. He saw the damage was done and couldn't be helped. He went up and built a cabin above the big falls on Tumbling River and began to think more of animals than men. Sim never set foot in a mine after that. It's only in the last few years that he's even started coming to town any more than he had to."

Silence held in the long room.

"Nobody ever got caught? The story never got around—about Sim?" Sadar asked.

"It got hinted at, sure. But there never was any proof. Besides Sim, there's three men in Sylvanite today who know what I've just told you."

"You and Deedee Ducray, and—"

"You."

Sedar stared.

Ben's wide face was unreadable. He rose and went behind the bar, returning with a bottle and two glasses.

"You're the third man. Being Sam Rigdon's grandson, you'll probably keep your mouth shut. You wondered about Sim last night. You'll be going up to see him, and I wanted you to know about him before you got to prodding him too hard."

He poured two drinks and took his at a gulp. "Some things don't rest so heavy when you talk about 'em. I fought Marcus Besse and the rest as hard as anyone. Now I'm back fighting his nephew, and it seems like a damn senseless thing for men getting as old as some of us are. I'm a little bit tired." He shook the bottle. It was almost empty. "But I guess it's the thing to do."

"You think the vug robbery touched off all the trouble?" Sadar asked.

"I know it did. It was several months in coming, but that's what started it; and that's why Sim don't like to talk about any part of it."

"You think the thieves were killed and the calaverite is still in the hill?"

Ben offered another drink. Sadar shook his head, and Liggett tipped the bottle and drained it.

"Sure the stuff is still underground! And there it can stay. Sim Tarwater may know, or have some idea where it is, even if we all know he didn't have anything to do with the stealing. Sim could make a good guess, maybe, because he knew that hill like no one else did, but Sim won't talk." Ben turned the empty bottle slowly in his big, brown-mottled hands. "Maybe Sam Rigdon made a good guess . . . "

Sadar rose. "If he did, he never mentioned it to me."

Ben nodded, his slate eyes searching Sadar's face. "I didn't suppose he ever did." He set the bottle on the table and rose. "Wait a minute, son."

When Liggett came back from behind the bar he offered Sadar the Frontier Model Colt. For the life of him, Sadar couldn't read a thing in Ben's eyes or expression. "Why?" he asked.

"I know you won't quit. I knowed it last night when I told you to." He put the gun on the table and pushed it toward Sadar. "Have you got one of your own?"

Sadar shook his head. "What were you warning me about last night?"

"I ain't sure. If I had been I'd come right out and say so."

"You're sure enough to offer me your gun," Sadar said.

"It never hurts to play safe." Liggett's eyes were hard and steady. "You going to take it?"

"With a handgun I couldn't hit the side of a barn in daylight—let alone someone after dark." Whether or not the last part of the sentence meant anything to Ben was impossible to tell.

"Well—" Liggett sighed heavily—"I suppose you want to know now where you can find Deedee and Sim . . ."

DRESSED in digging clothes Deedee was sitting on a half sack of blacksmith's coal near a wire gate in front of a small, weather-beaten house surrounded by vegetable gardens.

He stood up and grinned as Sadar neared. Eyeing the tall, unstooped figure, his big hands hanging idly at his sides, Sadar wondered just what might have happened if Deedee's hip hadn't gone bad when he was forcing action on Reeves. Still, an old man was old . . . and age was an insurmountable handicap against a powerful young man like Reeves.

"How's the hip?" Sadar asked.

"Good enough. It gets all right in between being hurt. What with the mine and the garden and one thing and another I ain't got time to pamper it." He sat down on the sack.

"You mean you're only carrying one sack up the hill?" Sadar asked, grinning.

"I could do it, don't you worry, but Jackie Rouviere saw me one day on the trail when my hip had gone bad—and now she makes me take one of the hotel's horses. I'm waiting for her now." Deedee grinned. Evidently Jackie hadn't found much opposition in forcing her help on him.

Sadar wondered if Reeves had ever attempted to lecture Jackie on the evils of extending help and courtesy to his enemies.

"Why didn't you say something last night, when you recognized me?" Sadar asked.

Deedee grinned. "Why didn't you say who you were—instead of using that bum gag about flourspar? I was right on the point of asking if you was any relation to Sam Rigdon, and then you popped up with that business about spar. Anybody knows there ain't a hundred pounds of it on this side of the range."

"All right, it was a poor stall." Sadar grinned. "Want to go up the hill with me and help carry the calaverite back?"

"Next year, Young Sam—after you get things mucked out and all your timbering done."

Sadar laughed. "Ben says she's still there."

"Ben's dead right, too." Deedee rose again. "But let me show you something." He pointed along the base of the mountain where rails lay almost buried in dump wash. A blue truck was backing slowly toward a great, sloping depression edged by trash. "See that hole? When I was a kid an old stope come in there. The mines close to it dumped cinders in it for years; the city has used it for a garbage dump ever since it caved in, but it's still quite a hole. That was just one of the littler stopes in this district. I remember others so big you couldn't see the candle of a man standing on the other side."

"The guy on the other side should have lit his candle," Sadar said.

"He—what?" Deedee grinned. "You're like Sam, all right." He looked up the mountain. "There's diggings in that hill that got enough timber in 'em to build a good-sized town. Once a switch engine on the Evening Star grade busted into a square-setted stope that run to grassroots. People who saw that engine said it didn't look no bigger down there than a grasshopper in a dry goods case." Deedee nodded seriously. "That just gives you an idea of what the hill is like inside. Sure,

Deedee pointed along the base of the mountain where a truck was backing toward a great, sloping depression.

I think the calaverite is there, too; but there may be a million tons of muck and a hundred feet of water on top of it."

"You think, then, that the thieves didn't have time to get the sacks to the surface?"

Deedee sat down on the sack again and plucked a dried clout of drilling mud from the frayed cuff of his overalls.

"Yep! That's one time I agreed with Marcus Besse."

"Do you think they got killed in the trouble after the robbery?"

Deedee nodded. "Four or five of the men who got killed were miners that were working mighty close to that old stope in the Hibernian. They were the ones who would have had the best show to run the drift to the vug. The owners couldn't prove a thing on 'em, so when they had a good chance, they had those four, five men shot up by toughs."

"Does Sim Tarwater figure the same way you do about the robbery?" Sadar asked.

"Sim doesn't even talk about it. If you go real easy you might get him to talk some to you, since Sim thought mighty well of your granddad." Deedee looked up with frank appeal in his eyes. "Don't push Sim too hard. He's lived in hell up until a few years ago, but if you do get him to talking, which would be more than anybody else has for the last forty-five years, you'd better listen close, because Sim sometimes gets his mind so far ahead of his words they don't make sense."

"I'm going to try him," Sadar said. "I'd like to stick around and talk to your girl friend, but I won't find calaverite that way."

"Save me a sack or two," Deedee said as Sadar started away.

CHAPTER VIII

OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

BEYOND the weed-grown lots where human predators had nibbled away most of the deserted shacks for firewood and stray boards, Sadar came to the toe of the mountain. Huge dumps with sloping ore bins that opened over rusting rails lay as far as he could see along the base of the slope.

He climbed to the tunnel level of the first dump he reached. Flaking paint on the dryroom read: *Hibernian Mines, No. 6.* Rusting locks showed on every door, though missing boards had left openings where twenty men could have sifted rapidly into the building. On the portal a heavy door with a broken top hinge was jammed in half open position; a rusty chain and lock dangled from it. Water was running from under it. At one time, he saw from rotting sills beside the track, there had been a shed from the portal to the main building.

The typewritten notice on the door was fresh enough: *Trespassers will be prosecuted!*

It was signed: *John R. Ralston.*

He went back to the edge of the dump and looked up the mountain, seeing an even break in the tree tops, a line that marked the railroad grade which Ben had said would lead to a trail that went around the shoulder of the mountain to Tarwater's cabin on Tumbling River.

Sadar went straight up the slope.

Growth was lush. At times dense aspens completely hid the town below him. Ferns, willows and rank plants with gourd-like leaves dragged against his legs. For stretches he might have been on a hillside ungutted of its gold, untouched on the surface. But here and there he stumbled over rusted cable, remnants of carbide cans, rotting ties with spikes still driven. He crossed old wagon roads where quick-growing aspens were rotted in unrutted surfacing.

He stopped on the fifth level of the Hibernian. Clear water was running in a large stream between heavy rocks that completely blocked the portal.

For a moment as he stood looking at the town from the dump where rusting rails extended into air above rotting posts from which the ties had long since fallen to go back to earth in the trees below, he imagined Sylvanite to be alive and roaring once more; saw throngs of miners tramping the streets; saw wagons raising dust; smoke slanted over the green valley from huge smelters at the edge of town; the mansions and big carriage houses were unweathered; and the scarred mountain around him teemed like an anthill.

Then he turned and looked at the caved portal where ferns were growing next to upthrust lagging in the black overburden that capped the cave-in.

The ski course lay between him and the next line of dumps running up the mountain. They must be the Vivandiere levels, since two mines lay side by side for six thousand feet. Five hundred miles of gloom and desolation. Ponderous slabs falling for thirty years, much longer in older parts of the workings. Sylvan Mountain had had a long time to grind inward as it tried to seal internal scars. This one caved portal was just a mild example.

He went out on the ski course where walking was easier and climbed upward toward the fourth level of the Hibernian, studying the ski course as he went. They had something here, all right. If the snow was any good . . .

The route he struck above Hibernian Number Three had been a railroad grade once. Now it was a bridle path. When he reached the north side of the ski course he plunged down through trees and came out on one of the Vivandiere dumps. Enough of it was left to tell him it was Number Three. Here most of the shed from the portal was intact. He entered it near the portal, feeling cool air bathe his face and neck.

Ninety-pound rail and concrete had been used to make the entrance solid until granite beyond the overburden held its own weight. A fast-moving stream of water ran between the tie ends and the foot wall. He stood in the damp coolness of the old bore for several moments, looking at his own tracks. They were the only ones that had disturbed the film for a long time.

He walked along the track to the dryroom. The shed ended in a doorway a hundred feet from the edge of the dump.

Wide entrances led from the side of the shed to the first half of the dryroom, and then a narrow door led to a second compartment exactly like the first. The sole of a gum boot, some rotting overalls and an overturned can of waste carbide lay on the floor.

The set-up was simple and effective to check highgrading. Miners coming off shift had been required to leave their digging clothes in the first room off the shed, then pass naked to the second room where their other clothes were. Going on shift they had gone through the process in reverse. Trammers coming out with muck or ore hadn't been allowed outside the door of the shed; they had probably waited in the shed while highly trusted employees took the cars on out to dump or ore bin.

No doubt existed in Sadar's mind that the job of bringing twenty-seven sacks of highgrade through a set-up like this would have been next to impossible, unless there had been assistance from the top men charged with enforcing the check.

He looked briefly through the rest of the building. Blacksmith shop, boiler room, a big steam air compressor with the brass grease cups still intact . . . Rats and their foulness everywhere. The silence of years was heavy.

He went back into the sunshine.

SEVERAL hundred feet down the mountain he saw a rider moving slowly upward on one of the ore roads. The man was hatless. He turned his head to look up the hill, and Sadar recognized him by the glint of sun on a red beard. It was Reeves. He raised one hand and waved carelessly at Sadar, then rode slowly out of sight behind a shoulder of rock.

He knows the mountain, Sadar thought. He'll probably be checking along behind me everywhere I go. Maybe he thinks he's made a deal with me, but still he wants to find out what I'm up to.

The voice of Tumbling River grew loud when Sadar left the bridle path to follow a blazed trail that led around the shoulder of the mountain. Spruce began to replace aspens. Then, as he kept climbing he heard the roar of Tumbling River growing fainter. Silvertip spruce increased in size, shadowing the damp trail where his feet made little sound. Gloom and quiet held sway here in the forest; the sounds of motors on the highway far below were only faint drones. Now and then he alarmed a blue squirrel, or a tattle-tale jay gave hoarse notice of his presence.

A half hour later he saw a break in the tree line as if he was nearing the top of a hill or a clearing.

His heart bucketed and he stopped quickly.

Ahead of him in the trail crouched a lion, tail a-switch, its summer brown body in living contrast to the dark forest around it.

Sadar stepped backward without intending to. The lion's heavy shoulder muscles rippled as it took two noiseless steps toward the man. Its belly was close to the ground, its entire body following the point of its sloping head. Sadar shifted his eyes to the break in the tree line for just an instant. A thin drift of smoke was rising above the tree tops.

He walked forward boldly and called, "Here, boy!"

The lion broke after Sadar's third step, leaped sidewise into the timber and went bounding like a mink toward the clearing.

Sunlight was welcome in the open space Sadar reached a few minutes later. A long, rectangular cabin sat solid on a rock foundation on a little rise that faced the river a hundred yards away. Here Tumbling River moved quietly over sand and gravel. Upstream were the mud and stick walls of beaver dams, lush grasses rising in a field where silvertips grew sparsely. Across the valley, high on the mountainside he saw the yellow line of a road. A sixteen-year-old pickup truck showed under a snug shed behind the cabin. On the far bank of the river, across a natural ford, he saw what looked like wheel ruts in the long grass. The trail he'd followed went on upstream, passing a hundred feet or more from the cabin.

Before Sadar got close little Sim Tarwater came out of the cabin, carrying a long bow; slung on one shoulder was a quiver of red, untanned cowhide. Tarwater grounded one end of the bow. He stood quietly, chin just above the scarred hand resting on the other end of the bow.

"Hello, Mr. Tarwater."

"Hello, Young Sam."

They stared at each other, Sadar un-

Sadar battled exasperation and watched the little man start for the woods behind the cabin.

certain how to begin asking what he wanted to know. He saw lines in Tarwater's face that he hadn't seen before, read again the same restless, uneasy look in the dark blue eyes.

"Going to kill a deer?" he asked. He realized how inane the question must have been, but Tarwater gave him no time to reflect upon it.

"I haven't killed a deer in more than forty years." The strangely soothing voice hinted at much unsaid.

Two half-grown conies emerged from a break in the rock foundation. They came boldly until they saw Sadar, then scampered between Tarwater's feet, peering around his legs like timid children. Then they began to dig vigorously in his rolled-up overall bottoms. Tarwater was utterly quiet, but Sadar saw his shirt jerk. Suddenly a striped chipmunk, a bold, fat job if there ever was one, appeared on the

little man's shoulder. It saw Sadar, jerked its tail up and down in rhythm with its squeaks and disappeared down Tarwater's back the way it had come.

"I suppose you know I'm trying to find that calaverite?" Sadar said.

Sim nodded. His eyes were quiet for an instant. "Everybody has, for years."

"My grandfather didn't tell me—"

"He didn't know," Tarwater said quickly. "Nobody knows anything about it any more."

"That's not what I—"

"I set great store by Sam," Tarwater said wistfully. "You look just like him. How much do you weigh?"

Sadar told him. "Look, Mr. Tarwater, I'd like to talk about that robbery. For myself—that is, as far as the calaverite itself, I don't want—" All the years of fighting against uncertainty and bitterness came back to Sadar. He cursed himself

for stumbling. If he could only explain his quest, make Tarwater understand why he wanted to find the highgrade . . .

"Sam done well, I hear, after he left," Tarwater said. "Mining is a dirty game, though. It's nothing but trouble . . ." His eyes flashed wildly.

"I want to clear up—"

"Get out of here!" Tarwater said suddenly, without raising his voice.

FOR a breath Sadar thought the order was directed at him. Then he saw Tarwater stoop and disengage one of the conies that was trying to crawl inside his pants leg. He pulled the little animal loose. It chittered in rage and began to chase its companion around and between Tarwater's ankles. "Darned whistle pigs!" he said mildly. He whisked an arrow from the quiver and tapped the animals lightly on their rumps. They scooted for their hole under the cabin. Sim replaced the arrow. "I got to go now. Make yourself to home in the cabin, if you want to."

"I want to find out—"

"All lies, nothing but lies. Forget the whole thing." Tarwater started for the woods behind the cabin. "Make yourself to home, Young Sam. Glad to have you."

Sadar battled exasperation and watched the little man go. Before Tarwater entered the forest the lion Sadar had seen down the trail came scratching down the trunk of a tree and flowed into woods ahead of the archer.

"Hell!" Sadar said to himself. He stood looking at shadows under tall trees. Sim and the lion were gone.

So Sim wasn't hunting deer. Yet the wooden shaft he had tapped the conies with was tipped with a broadhead, and when Tarwater had leaned over to pull the cony loose, Sadar had seen several aluminum-shafted arrows in the quiver.

A camp robber bird lit on a chopping block at one end of the cabin. It twisted its head at Sadar, flew to the cabin roof when he walked toward the door. Sadar didn't go beyond the heavy wooden bar that was, oddly, on the outside of the door. There were wooden bars on the insides of the windows, he noticed absently, as he stood debating whether to go back to Sylvanite or wait until Tarwater returned and tackle him again. Damn it! He'd been warned about Sim's touchiness, and then he'd opened the vug subject as abruptly as he'd tackled his grandfather—and with about the same results.

If he could only get Sim to sit still long enough to hear the whole story . . . He stood indecisively for several moments, looking at the odd outside bar. Near where the free end dropped into an iron latch, a small passage approximately six inches square led through the wall.

No telling how long Tarwater might be gone. He'd scared him off so badly perhaps it would be best to wait another day before making a more gentle approach.

Time was getting away. He'd spent too much of it in sparring. Now that everyone knew who he was and why he was in Sylvanite, why not approach the subject head-on? He thought of Reeves, wondering if the red-bearded man had followed him close to the cabin. Rouviere had broken up the conversation with Reeves just about the time it was getting interesting.

He started rapidly down the trail.

Less than a hundred yards from the cabin he met Jack Ralston. The garageman was carrying an aluminum fishing rod case and had a creel on his shoulder. Sadar looked at low-cut street shoes and thought of deep water and marshy ground in the beaver dams.

"Going to nail a few big ones?" Sadar asked.

Ralston nodded and gave him a surly look.

"You like to wade in street shoes?"

"If I do it's my business!"

They measured each other. Ralston's look reminded Sadar of the unwavering glint he'd seen in the lion's eyes a short time before near this exact spot.

"Another thing that isn't your business, Sadar, is poking around the Hibernian tunnels. I saw you on the dump at Six."

"You don't object to a person's walking across your property, do you?"

The sneer lines became channels in Ralston's cheeks. "Tell your boss—tell Rouviere he'd better keep his stooges away from the Hibernian."

Ralston went around Sadar and walked up the trail.

The flat grips of an automatic pistol showed between the blue steel butt frame of a gun in his hip pocket.

Sadar went down the trail, wondering why Ralston was so sure the calaverite was in the Hibernian. At that, he considered, the Hibernian was the most logical place for the sacks to be. Ralston had tried to get Rouviere interested in the proposition, then had turned sour when Rouviere refused. Now Ralston was convinced that Rouviere had sent Sadar to buy the mine.

CHAPTER IX

NO GAME FOR PIKERS

THE receptionist in Reeves' office told him that Reeves was not in. "Mr. Rouviere is, though," she added.

"He'll do," Sadar said.

The chain of command went to work and presently Pete Dill beckoned Sadar from the door to the inside office.

The millionaire seemed to fit Reeves' desk better than the owner. He watched Sadar cross the room and nodded toward a chair. More than ever Sadar noticed the contrast between the man's mild eyes and hammer-like jaw.

Sadar sat down, wondering how far he ought to go in revealing Reeves' underhand deal. Rouviere sat quietly and watched. Suddenly his smile blossomed and faded in almost the same instant. "Any luck?" he asked.

Sadar shook his head and started talking. He told his reason for wanting to find the calaverite. Whether or not Rouviere believed the story was a moot point. He listened politely enough and didn't miss a word.

At the end he said, "I can understand and appreciate why you would want the matter cleared up, but I'm afraid it's impossible."

"Ralston doesn't seem to think so."

"Ralston has a wild theory about a crosscut so far back on the fifth level of Hibernian, it would cost a fortune to get to it," Rouviere said.

"I understand you once considered reopening the Vivandiere?"

Rouviere ran one hand over the sheen of his bald head. "I did, but a conservative estimate of costs changed my mind in a hurry. The calaverite will never be found."

"You don't think my grandfather—"

"I do not! It may interest you to know that many years ago I had the source of your grandfather's income investigated thoroughly."

Sadar stared into Rouviere's eyes. They were as gentle as a bloodhound's; and below the man's mouth and jaw were as harsh as the blunt face of a maul.

"My uncle turned that hill inside out to find that calaverite," Rouviere said. "The workings were accessible then. Think of them now."

"Maybe he overlooked something," Sadar said.

Rouviere's lower lip went dubious. "Very unlikely."

The man seemed sincere. Sadar wondered if he knew that Reeves had added another employee in a deal that was in direct opposition to Rouviere's attitude toward the calaverite.

"Did you know that your manager hired me?"

Rouviere's jaw was truly grim now. "What for?"

"Ski instructor next winter, odd jobs during the summer."

Rouviere digested the information slowly. His voice was crisp when he spoke. "As of now, consider yourself discharged. I'll instruct Dill to give you a check for two weeks."

"What's the reason?"

"Two reasons," Rouviere said briskly. "First, it would be poor business policy to pay you for odd jobs until winter; second, I'm inclined to think you may have got Reeves worked up over that calaverite story. I want my employees to concentrate on necessary work, not some hopeless treasure hunt." Rouviere's heavy jaw snapped shut and he sat looking politely at Sadar.

The reasons, Sadar thought, were quite logical. "Forget the check for two weeks," he said.

"I prefer to pay it."

Sadar thought of the old men at the Fire Horse Club. They could use the money, if Rouviere wanted to be stiff-necked. "Suit yourself," he said.

He paused at the door to take one last look at the millionaire, trying vainly to

find some other reason for being fired, other than the two perfectly plausible ones given. Rouviere's face was expressionless. His neatly trimmed fringe of brown hair looked like a band of rich velvet below the hard metallic gleam of his bald head. His large, polite eyes rested unblinkingly on Sadar, and below was that brutal jaw and nutcracker mouth in hard composure.

"Good-bye," Rouviere said.

A half hour later Sadar was headed for the forlorn part of town that held the Fire Horse Club. In his pocket was one hundred and eighty dollars of unearned money from Rouviere's check. He didn't like the feel of it and wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible.

It struck him that a minor puzzling aspect of his talk with Rouviere was the implication that the millionaire did not trust Reeves' judgment in relation to the highgrade. Maybe Rouviere didn't trust Reeves' honesty, either, but he wasn't doing anything about it. Sadar considered what the farmer had told him about Reeves' dishonest invoices.

Well, that was Rouviere's problem.

He saw the Firse Horse ahead, its clean windows standing out among surrounding structures with boarded fronts, broken windows and dusty entrances. Maybe deep-voiced old Ben Liggett would suspect that Sadar was trying to bribe him into enlarging his warning when Sadar offered the money.

BEN was not in the club. The Swede and three others were playing poker in the casino. Except that the Swede had changed his white shirt for a blue one, already rumpled enough for three days' wearing, he appeared to have been sitting in the same chair all night. He greeted Sadar jovially. The other players grunted briefly, looked annoyed by the interruption.

"Where's Ben?" Sadar asked.

"On the crank at Deedee's shaft," one of the players said curtly. "Deal up, Jammer," he told the Swede.

Sadar watched for several moments. "All profits of this game go to the club?" he inquired.

Jammer grinned at his companions. "Every damn cent goes to the house!"

"Every cent," a player repeated.

The man in front of Sadar drew to three tens after the player under the gun opened. Jammer dealt two queens to go with the tens. Betting ran heavy. The Swede laid down his hand and yawned. A third player stayed, running several stacks of pale yellow chips and a flush hard against the fullhouse. He read the sad news with a grunt.

"Under the gun I open, with three fat K-boys," the loser muttered. "He draws two lousy cards and fills!"

Sadar took the one hundred and eighty dollars from his wallet. He dropped the notes on the table. "Who's the bank?"

Three of the players looked at each other quietly, then at the Swede, who picked the money up slowly. "This all you want?"

Sadar nodded.

Jammer reached down on the floor and came up with three white chips. There wasn't another one on the table. All four players looked at Sadar with expressionless faces. He met their questioning stares and a feeling of utter foolishness began to make his forehead hot.

Sixty dollars for a white chip! The ante was one blue. The yellows must be worth five hundred or a thousand.

Jammer started to stow the money in a wallet heavy with other notes. "I'll stake you for a hundred and twenty and you can play one hand for the ante." His little eyes arched inquiringly at Sadar.

Sadar took another look at the wooden faces of the other players. His voice didn't seem to come out as it should when he said, "Maybe I'm getting over my head. Forget it."

Jammer handed the money back. "Always like to have new blood in our little game."

Sadar tried a grin. "That isn't blood—it's murder!"

Jammer laughed.

"Whose deal?" one of the players asked impatiently.

Sadar went out of the casino with the back of his neck burning. He felt that derisive grins were following him all the way; but when he turned suddenly and looked back, all four men were completely intent on their game.

He stood a moment at the end of the bar, his thoughts awash from the impact

of the high-stake game. Were they ribbing him? They must be! He glanced at the empty bottles on the backbar, thought of Deedee's patched shirt. Another quick glance behind him showed that no one was paying him the least attention. If they were acting they ought to have Academy Awards. "A few of us oldtimers try to stick together the best way we can." The best seemed very good indeed, what with white chips at sixty bucks a head and none in the game. With money like that around what business had Ben and Deedee up on the hill working a shallow hole?

He tried another look at the game to see if he could surprise a grin. They didn't seem to know he was living.

Some game, he thought, if Jammer's quotations were on the level. He felt fast-rising curiosity about the kind of mine Deedee and Ben were working on top of the hill.

It was a little late to be starting up there today. But tomorrow . . .

Ben was sacked out, snoring like a fat bear, when Sadar returned to the Fire Horse after dinner. The poker game was going strong, with a few new hands and some of the others from the afternoon session. Jammer invited Sadar to sit in with such heartiness that Sadar's suspicion of having been ribbed came back. No one smiled.

He went toward Deedee's shack until he saw it was dark.

Walking back to the hotel he vowed he'd have a look at the old boys' mine first thing in the morning. He stopped in front of Ralston's garage and asked Charley if he knew Jammer.

"Jammer Roos? Hell yes! Haven't seen the Jammer for six, seven months, I reckon. Where'd you play poker with him?" Old Charley cackled at the implication.

"Saw him in Phoenix or Los Angeles or someplace," Sadar said absently, mulling over the fact that Jammer seemed to be hiding out at the Fire Horse Club.

"That's where he winters, sure enough!" Charley said.

EARLY the next morning Sadar started up the mountain. This time he followed the railroad grade for a long way, detouring three rotting trestles where it made long switchbacks. Above Five Vivandiere he started taking shortcuts straight up the slope. Above Number Two Vivandiere, far up the mountain, he again encountered the bridle path. The way ahead, he noticed, seemed oddly bare of vegetation.

When he got to the point where the grade intersected the line of the Vivandiere tunnel he saw the reason.

The roadbed was made of concrete re-

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inforced with steel rails, and spanned an enormous hole. Sloping sides where trees were rooted led down and down to darkness. Weathered rocks still gripped between the closely placed reinforcing showed that the bridge had once rested on both sides of a lesser cave-in, for a cave-in it was, a collapsed stope that had run almost to the surface. He tossed a large rock up and out. It turned slowly, with the sun shining brightly on mica, flashed downward past aspens clinging to the sloping sides. Seconds later Sadar heard the sullen *ca-choom!* of the stone striking water somewhere far below.

He followed the path that detoured on the upper side, and continued on the grade until he saw that it was not going to lead him upward very fast. Knowing that Deedee's claim lay athwart the ski course on top of the mountain, he cut through the trees on an angling course calculated to bring him close to it.

The mine dump he soon came across was much smaller than most of the waste-piles on Sylvan Mountain. Water was

The water might go high enough to make a man rather unhappy, especially if it got neck-deep.

working its way from a caved portal and had undermined one side of a decrepit blacksmith's shop. As he started to pass above the portal he stopped suddenly, staring at fresh tracks that disappeared down a slanting hole between the tunnel roof and muck pile. From the long gouges in the slope it appeared that someone had scrambled in and out of that hole recently. He looked on the uphill side at shattered rocks thrown to the surface years before when the first cut had been made to start the tunnel. The rocks were resting precariously in dry dirt, ready to start a miniature run with little urging. But someone had ventured into the opening.

Sadar let himself down gingerly, careful not to disturb the uphill balance of rocks and dirt. He grabbed at an up-ended piece of pole lagging when he slipped. Cork-light from dry rot, the wood broke and he sat down hard on the sloping muck. Fine dust filtered down in a dry stream, but the rocks above him didn't move. He eased himself on down to the tunnel floor and stood up.

A swarm of gnats hovering just beyond the light brushed against his face and tangled in his brows. He brushed at them, feeling coolness from the bore wash over him. When his eyes became accustomed to the gloom ahead, he saw that big sections of decomposing granite had sloughed from the walls, half choking the tunnel. He walked a few paces ahead. The dark sheen of quiet water lay beyond the barrier. Nothing, he thought, is as black and motionless as water trapped underground.

Rather small footprints showed that someone had preceded him into the hole, looked at the bore ahead and gone back to safe, sensible sunlight.

He started to do the same.

Rocks and dirt began sliding in small amounts at first. Then it seemed that all the mass of loose material above the opening had broken away. It poured down rapidly. When the slide ceased Sadar stood with the smell of dust and dry rot in his nostrils, squinting thoughtfully at small shafts of light coming through openings no thicker than his hand.

"Stay out of old holes, 'lessin' you're figuring on timbering up!" a veteran miner once had told Sadar. "Then start from the surface and do your work sound."

Sadar looked at the barrier, remarking to himself how wonderful and futile good advice is. He had no illusion about the sunlight showing. Move one rock, another comes down to take its place. Move that one . . . Keep on moving rocks.

The mine was no longer cool. It was cold and damp.

He sat down on the slope of muck and lit a cigarette, postponing for the time the seven different kinds of fools he was going to call himself. Smoke from his cigarette drifted slowly along the tunnel, then shot up abruptly through the narrow openings.

Suddenly he missed the sounds of water gurgling in the rocks. He looked down. Water was backing up behind the new cave-in, which had contained enough fine material to choke outlets among the rocks. Well, it would only go so high before it found new outlets or washed the old ones clear; but it might go high enough to make a man rather unhappy, especially if it got neck-deep.

His cigarette hissed sharply when he dropped it and went to work.

He dragged loose rocks away from the muck pile, letting those above tumble down, alert for any large rounded ones that might come bounding to break a leg or crush a foot. The rocks he threw behind him splashed in the water, helped raise its level. His feet churning on the sides of the slope helped pack fine material hard to form a tighter dam.

It wasn't long before he had a small opening, rock-edged and ready to grind shut any minute. He took the longest piece of dry lagging that had broken during his descent and poked it carefully through the hole, probing for big rocks around the edges. He found one. The pole was rotten and he didn't think he'd exerted much pressure, but the rock had a hair-trigger temper.

It came down with a grinding rush as he leaped back. Others followed. Now the opening was quite small and jammed with bigger stones than he remembered having been above the portal.

The water was numbing cold around his ankles.

(End of Part II)

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES GEER

MR. THIRD ENGINEER

IT WAS Luke Sturdy's fist that got me a job aboard the *Howanna,* and it was because of him that I survived the disaster. He knew his business, when apparently none of the other officers did. Or perhaps their intense hatred of him made them inordinately stubborn.

An old freighter out of New York, the *Howanna* put in at Norfolk to coal, and her radio operator came into the Norfolk office with a black eye. Dropping his bags on the floor, he pushed his hat back, tossed his assignment book at the inspector and pointed to his eye.

"If I have to sail with a thug, you can also have my operator's license!" he said.

"What's the matter?" the inspector asked.

"Didn't I just tell you? You can relieve me or check me out for good. I don't care."

"Where's she bound?"

"Buenos Aires, with general cargo." He didn't say her number two hold was filled with naphtha.

The inspector looked at me. "You want her, son?"

I was broke. It was November and a

I thought Luke was going to paste him again, but he only shook him a little.

By ETHAN GRANT

cold rain was falling. I pegged the other operator for a hot-head. "Trip to South America?" I said. "Sure mike!"

My last ship had sunk in a September gale, and I believed that old wheeze about lightning never striking twice. But it did strike again, and those of us who survived the *Howanna* disaster thanked our stars for Luke Sturdy's courage and remarkable judgment.

THE *Howanna* was coaling at Sewells Point. The inspector drove me out, to check the inventory and see that I was acceptable to Captain Plank. I was, because the Old Man had no other choice. He'd been drinking and he wasn't at all cordial.

"A kid!" he snorted. "I get a good operator and that smart third engineer drives him off, and you fetch me a kid!"

"He's got a good record," the inspector assured him.

Captain Plank was a weak-faced guy with bloodshot eyes. I met the other officers at supper. The mate was Joe Wright, a brute of a fellow with a long face, like a sheep. Mr. Manley, the mousy chief engineer, had yellowed white hair. There were two other mates and the three assistant engineers.

Luke Sturdy, the third assistant, was the only one of the lot who'd cleaned up for supper. He had alert blue eyes and apparently more energy than he could find use for. The messman brought his soup. He tasted it and looked up at the chief, put his spoon down and turned to the fat-soft steward who was leaning against the buffet.

"Take this dishwater away and fetch me some food!" Luke glanced at me. "We also need a new cook, I guess."

Captain Plank, his spoon poised above the greasy soup, said, "Mister, you've found fault ever since we left New York. If you don't like this ship, you've still got time to pack up and get off."

Luke Sturdy was tall, weighed around two-twenty and was too young, I thought, to show disrespect. But he put his big fists on the table and leaned toward the skipper as if the heavier the braid the less he cared.

"Captain, I was on the beach for four months. I don't like being on the beach. But I also don't like sloppy cooking or sloppy anything else. I like things right."

"That's enough!" the skipper snapped, and looked down across the table at Mr. Manley.

The old chief engineer stirred uncomfortably. "Mr. Sturdy, we get along with others, us engineers."

"When it's efficient, sir, yes." Luke Sturdy nodded. "I reported the first two carloads of coal they dumped in the deep tank were soaking wet, but you didn't do a thing about it. And it's dangerous, wet coal on a tropic voyage."

Criticism of his superior was bad behavior and a violation of tradition. Mr. Manley was obviously upset. He waggled a nervous finger. "All right now, Sturdy, you keep quiet!"

First Mate Joe Wright had turned his chair toward Luke.

Captain Plank warned, "I'll log you for insubordination, Sturdy. Say any more and I'll log you two days for one!"

It brought a thin smile to Luke Sturdy's face. "Captain, since my wife and kid've got to eat, I apologize."

"That's better," the skipper said, and settled back.

But Mr. Manley got up and left the saloon, maybe with nervous indigestion, and Joe Wright kept staring at Luke. Then he turned his chair back and I detected something in the way he glanced at the skipper. The meal was finished in silence and the others drifted out, till only Luke Sturdy and I were left.

"Lunkhead!" Luke growled. "All lunkheads!"

Joe Wright had come back for his cap. "Sturdy, if you mean me I think I'll see you on deck."

Luke Sturdy turned in his chair. "You want your puss rearranged, mister?"

The mate reached for his cap, yanked it down over his eyes and got out. We heard him go up the ladder to the lower bridge. The skipper's cabin door banged shut.

Luke Sturdy's thumb jerked upward. "Straight to the Old Man! Maybe to give him hell for not logging me. A weak-sister skipper and a lunkhead mate always mean trouble, Sparks."

He rose, straightened the tablecloth where the mate had sat, took his cap and left the saloon.

GETTING the *Howanna* away from the dock that night was a clumsy job. With Captain Plank on the bridge, Joe Wright on the bow and Mr. Fraser, the squatty second mate, on the poop, a lot of shouting was going on, not only by the skipper and the mates, but also aboard the tugs and on the dock. I went out and stood beside the radio shack on the after end of the boat-deck to watch.

The sailor at the winch aft failed to allow enough slack, or maybe something went wrong with the winch, for on the dock they couldn't release the stern line from the bitt. After some yelling between the poop and the bridge, Mr. Fraser seized an ax and chopped the hawser in two. Its short end whipped back and narrowly missed the winch operator, causing some loud profanity back there.

I began to see what Luke Sturdy meant.

Luke had the eight to twelve below. I went inside, put the phones on and began the watch. After we'd rounded Cape Henry and headed south, I called NAM, the nearest shore station, and sent the required sailing report. At ten o'clock I gave Mr. Clark, the third mate, Arlington's time signal, then went to my quarters in the adjoining room.

Through the engine room skylight I saw Mr. Manley, the worry-wart old chief engineer, pacing the top grating above the pounding engine, and I could hear Luke Sturdy raising hell with his crew.

When I turned in, the wind was kicking the seas up. I don't know how long I slept, but when I woke, the engine was silent. I went back to sleep and when I woke again at seven-thirty, we were under way.

I learned at breakfast that steering gear trouble had delayed us about two hours. Luke Sturdy had eaten early and relieved Mr. Howard, the first assistant, at eight o'clock. Mr. Howard had thin hair and a sad face, which he hadn't washed before coming to breakfast.

"Sturdy ain't satisfied with some of his crew," he told Mr. Manley. "Wants to swap an oiler and two firemen for some on the four to eight."

"He'll do no such thing!" Mr. Manley declared.

"Says he'll only have efficient men in his watch."

Mr. Manley jerked his nervous hands. "Mr. Howard, you tell him who sets watches in my department. You tell him, mister!" He shot an agitated glance at Captain Plank.

The skipper looked at Joe Wright, and said to Mr. Manley, "Guess we better have a talk with the young man, Chief."

Joe Wright said, "Only way to handle Luke Sturdy's with a marlinspike. He messes with me, that's what'll happen!"

I was polishing the transmitter brightwork that afternoon, when Luke Sturdy came in. In white ducks and shirt, he looked as spick-and-span as a college athlete after a brisk workout and a shower.

"Atta boy, Sparks," he said. "I like a guy that keeps things clean and efficient. You fetch any books aboard?"

"No. Some magazines though. There on the settee."

He picked up the magazines. "And you're decent. The other operator tried to toss me out on my ear."

"I saw his eye," I said.

"He swung first," Luke said. "Otherwise I wouldn't have touched the punk."

The bells jingled and the engine stopped. He glanced through the after port at the crazily twisting wake astern.

"If they'd called me last night, I'da fixed that steering engine so it'd stayed fixed," he said.

He dropped the magazines, went down the ladder and followed Mr. Manley and the first assistant aft. Half an hour later the engine room telegraph sounded again and we moved on. Luke Sturdy came back to the radio shack, wiping the grease from his big hands with a piece of waste. There wasn't a smudge on his clothing.

A quartermaster opened the door and handed me a message, scrawled in pencil to the owners in New York. I had trouble reading the Old Man's writing.

Luke Sturdy took it, and read, *"Having trouble with stearing engine. May have to put in somewhere."* Luke snorted. "He's crazier'n hell! I fixed that. Why, the old lunkhead can't even write! Look how he spells steering!"

He took one of the magazines and left. Outside, Number 4 lifeboat's canvas was flapping in the wind. He stopped and cinched its tie lines. Captain Plank was watching from the bridge. The hasp on

the potato bin cover was open. Luke pushed it down. It sprung back up. Putting the magazine down, he grasped the cover with both hands, twisted it and pushed the hasp down with a foot. It stayed. He picked up the magazine and went below.

In the starboard wing of the bridge, Captain Plank spoke to the squatty second mate. Mr. Fraser left the brige, came up the ladder and tightened all the other boat covers. He examined the potato bin hasp and wagged his head.

"Guy'll drive us nuts!" he mumbled.

KNOWING there was bad blood between Luke Sturdy and Joe Wright didn't add to my enjoyment of the tropical weather. I didn't like the looks of the big mate and kept thinking about his threat to use a marlinspike. But it wasn't till a few days after we'd entered the northeast trades that they actually tangled.

Shortly after supper one evening, Luke was on the starboard boat-deck, apparently trying to walk off his surplus energy. The mate was at the topbridge binnacle. Below, the engine pounded at full-speed and the smoking funnel was vibrating a little. Luke stopped, looked up at it and grasped one of the funnel's cable guys.

"I'll be responsible for the gear on deck, mister!" the mate bellowed.

Luke Sturdy glanced up at him, yanked the loose guy back and released it. It went "Whan-n-n-ng!" like a string on a bull fiddle.

"Then whyn't you have these things tightened?" Luke shouted. He went over and snapped the for'ard guy. "Mighty sloppy seamanship, Mr. Mate!"

"You lay off, I said!"

Captain Plank popped from his cabin, followed by the white-haired chief engineer. The skipper looked up at the mate, who said something to him. The skipper then shouted, "What are you doing, Mr. Sturdy?"

"These funnel guys are all loose, sir!"

"Come up here," the skipper beckoned. "Me and the chief want a word with you."

Luke left the boat-deck, went up the lower bridge ladder and disappeared into the skipper's cabin. A few minutes later he came back to the radio shack, fuming.

"I just got logged six days' pay. He's drunk, so I just bit my tongue and took it."

"Maybe he'll scratch it off when he sobers up," I said.

"I like a drink myself, but ashore. A man's got no business boozing on a ship, specially with naphtha in the holds."

"Naphtha?" It was the first I'd heard about the naphtha.

"Number two's full of it. And they dumped some wet coal in the bunker. I don't like it."

"I don't get it," I said.

"Soon's as it's dark, I'm tightening those damn funnel stays!"

He left. And a few minutes after dark I heard him out there, twisting the turnbuckles. Then I heard a loud oath and the metallic ring of something striking the funnel. I rushed out, and in the glow from the skylight could see Luke Sturdy bending over something huddled on deck.

"Help me carry him inside," Luke said. "A marlinspike didn't miss my ear more'n an inch. I cold-cocked him."

We carried Joe Wright into the radio room and stretched him out on the settee. I could smell liquor on him.

"Some water," Luke Sturdy said.

I went into my quarters and brought a glass of water. Luke dashed it on the mate's face. His hand went to his head and his eyes opened and closed again.

"Don't you ever try that again, fella," Luke told him. He'd brought the marlinspike in. He picked it up and offered it to the mate. "Here's your play-purty. You better put it back where it belongs."

Joe Wright pushed it away and staggered to his feet. "You crazy fool! I'll see you lose your license for that."

Luke seized his shirtfront in a big fist. I thought he was going to paste him again. But he only shook him a little.

"Mister, you've got no right to booze on a job where you're responsible for the lives of forty men. You just try to get my license!" Then he pushed the mate outside. "Go on along now! Your cap's out by the funnel."

Luke Sturdy sat down. "I hate to smack somebody like that. But why'n hell don't they learn to do things right?"

"I wouldn't know," I said. "But you'd better watch him. You're lucky you're not a corpse."

AT BREAKFAST next morning, nobody asked about the mate's bruised face, so I knew there'd already been some talk. By the way Joe Wright ate, it was evident that he had a pretty sore jaw. I wondered if the skipper would have Luke Sturdy on the carpet again. As it turned out, he didn't. He and the chief engineer and Joe Wright had got together and decided it might be dangerous to fool with him.

Luke brought my magazines back that afternoon. "You keep a neat shack, boy. Most operators are lazier'n hell."

He rubbed a fly-speck off the shiny copper lead-in with his sleeve, punched me lightly in the ribs and left.

For several days now we'd had sultry weather and glassy seas. Then one afternoon below the equator a strong hot wind came out of the west. That was probably why nobody going up and down the deck noticed the thin yellow smoke fringing the starboard coaming of the *Howanna's* bunker hatch.

On his way from the saloon to relieve the first assistant for supper, Luke Sturdy came out of the port passageway. I'd just come down from the boat-deck. He stopped, faced the wind and sniffed. He went around the hatch, put his nose down to the edge of its tarpaulin and sniffed.

"We got a bunker fire," he said. His fingers in his hip pockets, he turned and looked at the light seas. He glanced up at the bridge, where Joe Wright and Captain Plank had their noses over the weathercloth. "It's deep, too," he said.

"We'd better report it," I told him.

"No. The Old Man'd likely order the hatch opened. That'd let air in. You keep quiet. I'll go down to the fireroom. If it's not too far from the coal door, maybe we can dig it out. If we can't—well, we may need somebody to come looking for the lifeboats."

I went on in to supper. The third mate went to the bridge and Joe Wright and the skipper came down. Others came in, and there was the usual talk, while I sat there without any appetite. The skipper had decided, he said, to discharge Luke Sturdy as soon as we got into port.

Joe Wright and the first assistant engineer finished eating and went back on watch. Presently Mr. Howard reappeared at the saloon door.

"Chief, we got a fire in the deep tank!"

Mr. Manley spun around, got to his feet and looked at the skipper. Captain Plank reached for his cap.

The smoke was clearly visible now. The skipper shouted up to Joe Wright, who blew his whistle and yelled to the bosun. I went up the ladder and stood at the boat-deck railing. The crew came aft, the bosun in the lead.

When Luke Sturdy, shirtless and blackened from head to foot, came out of the fiddley, they'd already peeled a corner of the tarpaulin back, lifted a section of the hatch cover and were dragging the hose up.

"Captain, I wouldn't do that," Luke panted. "I mean, open the bunker."

The skipper, standing with his hands behind him, turned. "Oh, you wouldn't!"

"No, sir. I'd keep it closed and run full-speed for the nearest port, Pernambuco, where there's fire tugs. It'll take tons of water to squelch this. It's over in this corner, and we can't reach it from below. If—"

"Shut up!" the skipper spat.

Luke, his sweaty, coal-blackened muscles glistening in the sinking red sun, stood there with his hands on his hips, his mouth slightly open. "Yes, sir," he said, and went to his quarters.

JUST before eight o'clock that night, Luke Sturdy came to the radio room, his fists opening and closing.

"Somebody's got to make a decision, Sparks," he said. "It's spontaneous combustion and running a piddling hose down through two hundred tons of coal won't stop it. I've seen two bunker fires before. By leaving the hatch on, we once made a ten-day run to port without damage. The other time, they opened the hatch. That was bad. And we didn't have explosives in the next hold, either."

"You think she'll blow up?" I asked, frightened.

"If it burns through to the for'ard bulkhead, she'll blow sure as hell! And when it begins to look bad, I'm telling you to send SOS and we're getting off."

"Without the skipper's orders, it'd cost me my ticket," I said. "Luke, I couldn't do it."

He turned and went below.

A few minutes later, Mr. Manley's voice came up through a ventilator. "Why, you young idiot, that'd be mutiny!"

By morning, they'd removed the entire hatch cover and were playing four hoses into the coal. The wind drove a steam-filled sulphurous cloud off to port. Joe Wright was up beside the charthouse, barking down at the men with the hoses. The pumps were spilling the black bilge seepage out onto the well-decks and off through the scuppers.

A few minutes before eight, the engine was stopped. Luke Sturdy came out of the saloon. He watched the men with the hoses. Captain Plank leaned his arms on the railing outside his cabin. Luke Sturdy watched the increasing volume of smoke, shot a few anxious looks up at the skipper and finally spoke to the bosun. I don't know what he said, but the bosun then went down the ladder toward the foc'sle.

He came back shortly, followed by the firemen who'd been off watch. They went down along the starboard housing and came up the after ladder to the boat-deck. I saw them standing back there in a huddle. Joe Wright watched them.

Luke Sturdy came up the ladder, his neck veins pulsing. He turned, faced the skipper and shouted across the bunker, "Captain, we'd better take to the boats! She'll blow up any minute now!"

The skipper glared across at him. Joe Wright hurried off the bridge, spoke to Captain Plank and they went into his cabin.

"All right!" Luke shouted. "Let's get the boats off!"

Apparently, he'd had an understanding with the men, for they promptly dropped the hoses and almost ran over one another getting up the ladders.

"Go send SOS, Sparks!" Luke snapped.

"Now wait a minute!" I said.

He seized my arm. I looked across at the lower bridge. The skipper and Joe Wright were back out there, each with a revolver. "Sparks, don't you touch that radio!" Joe Wright shouted, and started down the ladder. I stopped.

But he never made it, for the bunker's surface suddenly collapsed to reveal a roaring holocaust practically there in his face. He retreated up the ladder.

I didn't need further urging toward the radio shack. Luke Sturdy was at my heels.

"Know the position? Here! I got it from the third mate, at breakfast. Send it and get the hell out of there!" He yelled to the other men, "The port boats!"

The chief engineer, one of the other assistants and the steward were trapped in the saloon, the others somewhere else. I never saw any of them again.

As I started the generator, Luke Sturdy yelled down through a ventilator, to the men on watch below.

It's strange what thoughts race in the head of a scared man. I kept thinking how the radio operator mustn't leave a ship till everyone else is off but himself and the skipper. After sending the distress signal and repeating the position three times, I went through my quarters and out onto the port deck. One boat had already been lowered. I stopped and looked in the direction of the bridge. The *Howanna's* bow had swung into the wind and the heat back here was terrific.

"What the hell you doing?" Luke Sturdy yelled, then seized me around the waist and tossed me into the boat ahead of him. "All right, lower away! No, hold it a minute!"

Somebody had knocked a life ring down. Maybe it was nervous tension, maybe Luke Sturdy was such a stickler for efficiency he couldn't help it. He picked the life ring up and put it back in its rack on the railing, twisting it till its lettering was rightside up—with every man in the boat yelling at him.

He leaped in and the boat practically fell from its davits. We shoved off and took to the oars.

"Look out!" somebody shouted. "That damned mate's gonna shoot!"

Joe Wright did shoot, wildly. He was aiming again when the whole for'ard part of the *Howanna* seemed to rise in a blinding red upheaval. Then it settled back in a ball of flame and billowing smoke.

"Duck!" Luke said, and debris rained all around us.

We sat there, motionless, watching what was left of the *Howanna* disappear beneath the shimmering surface.

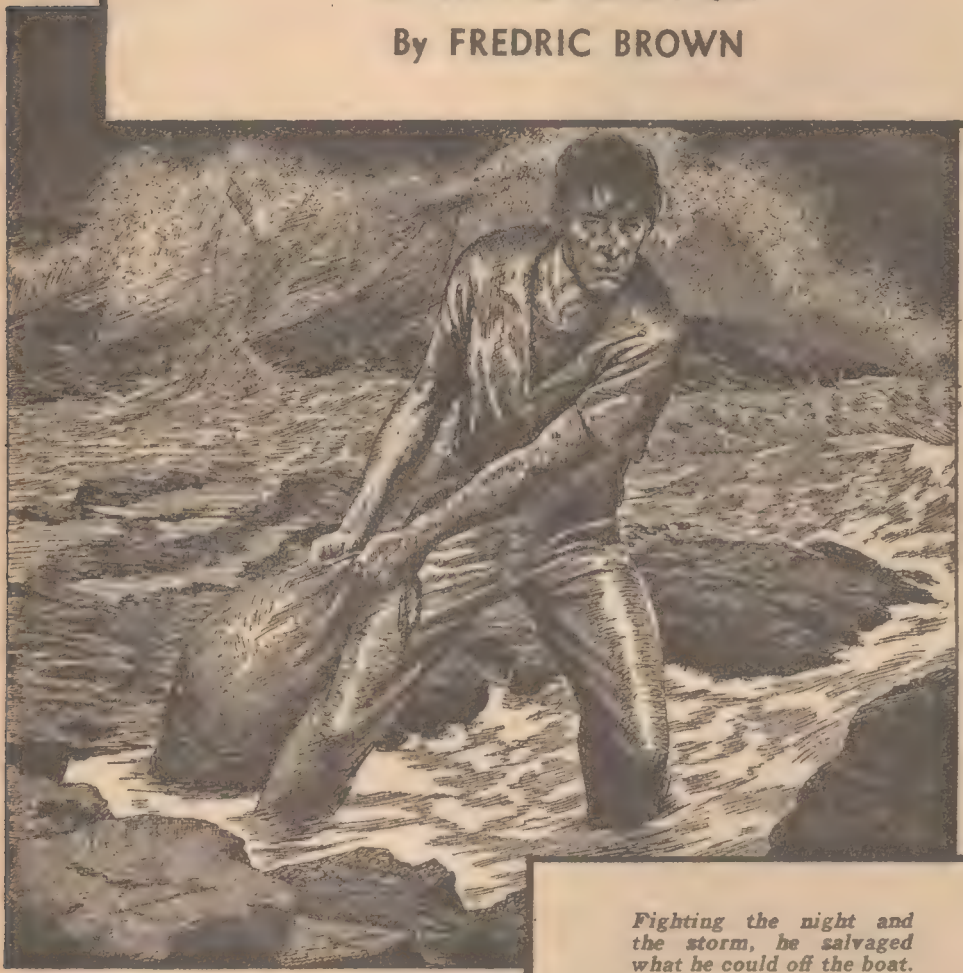
"The poor devils!" Luke Sturdy said, and looked into the bottom of the boat for several minutes. Then he glanced up at me, pointed downward, and said, "Sparks, tie your damn shoe laces!"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Sturdy," I said.

FOUR-LETTER WORD

AN OFF-THE-TRAIL STORY

By FREDRIC BROWN



Fighting the night and the storm, he salvaged what he could off the boat.

ILLUSTRATED BY
L. STERNE STEVENS

RUPERT GARDIN said, "Ummm." It was the only uneloquent statement he'd made in the half-hour I'd been interviewing him. But the question I'd just asked him had been a stickler.

I remember how he inclined his graying, leonine head as though giving deep thought to what he would say next. But when he spoke, it was merely to echo part of my question. "The greatest single poem?"

I narrowed it down for him. "The greatest single poem written originally in English," I said. "Let's eliminate other languages and even translations."

He nodded gravely. And thought again; his eyes closed.

I remember the awe I felt, just looking

at him. I was just a cub then, and Rupert Gardin—dean of American literary critics—was my first really important interview. We sat in his hotel room, just the two of us, on a hot summer day. On the table beside him was a pitcher of iced tea, and we each held a glass. I remember the cool, smooth feel of mine.

"The greatest poem," he murmured.

I remembered something I had forgotten, that he himself had published poetry. I added quickly, "Aside from your own poetry, Mr. Gardin."

He waved an impatient hand. "Mine? What I have written, young man, was writ in water, in blowing sand. As ephemeral as the smoke-writing of our aborigines."

He sighed deeply. He said, "It would be the poem by Carl Marney."

IT WAS my turn to think, and it didn't do me any good. I said, "I'm afraid I don't know it, or him."

"I doubted that you would know his name, but it was fairly well-known for a while in the twenties. He was a very wealthy young man. His father had made a great fortune in real estate and had died while young Marney was in his teens, leaving several millions in trust. He was the only heir—an only child, and his mother had died while he was an infant.

"He went to Harvard, then to Oxford—Balliol, I believe. He'd written a volume of verse—nice stuff, very sensitive, but not up to what he was to do later. More tea?"

I nodded and held out my glass. Gardin went on talking even as he poured it. "At twenty-three, Carl Marney had everything. Youth, talent, a magnificent education, health—he was as strong as an ox—money, love, anything you can name. He had love of life, love of adventure.

"He had the love of a woman, too, and he was mad about her. She was the daughter of an English peer; he'd met her while he was at Oxford. He was engaged to her and they were to be married the next year, when she would be twenty-one. Oh, Marney knew that the girl's father, the earl, wanted an American fortune, but the girl really loved him and that was all that mattered. He was head over heels in love with her, and—if they'd ever married—he could spare a million to her father and never feel it."

"They didn't marry, though?"

"No. There was almost a year to wait before she'd be twenty-one—and they'd definitely decided to wait till then. He had come back to America—partly, I gather, because he didn't trust himself near her and he was young and foolish; he didn't want to touch her until they *were* married."

"Was that foolish?" I asked.

"Yes. Very. He had a year to wait, and he turned to another love for solace. His love of adventure. He bought himself a beautiful little one-man sailboat in Boston and started out to sail around the Horn."

"The Horn?"

"Cape Horn, the tip of South America. His destination was San Francisco, the long way around, but he never got there. He was shipwrecked on a little island off Chile, a week after he had rounded the Horn. It was an uninhabited island not much bigger than a city block, and he was on it nine years."

"Nine years?" I said, "and he stayed sane?"

"No. He went quite off his rocker toward the last; he's in an asylum now, if he's still alive . . ."

I got the picture as he talked. First, of course, the shipwreck at night in a storm. Running before that storm into pitch darkness, Carl Marney's little yacht had taken the rocky south coast of the little island he hadn't know was there head-on and it had taken the bottom out of the boat. The impact of it had thrown him out of the cockpit and into the shallow water; it was a sand beach with rocks sticking up out of the sand, and his boat was hung up on one of those rocks.

Fighting the night and the storm, knowing that his boat would probably break up before the storm was over, he salvaged what he could off the boat—provisions, water (it turned out later that didn't matter; there was a spring on the island), his radio set, log and papers—and carried them to higher ground. And then there was nothing more to do but to sit beside them, shivering in the stormy dark until morning.

And when dawn came, his boat was gone and he could see where he was. That is, he could see that he was on a tiny island. By roughest reckoning he

knew it was a hundred miles at least, possibly two hundred, off the coast of Chile.

And it wasn't in a steamer lane; he wasn't sure of that at first, but he became sure as the months went by, as the years went by. When a steamer did come, it was too late. Nine years on an almost barren postage stamp of an island, alone, is too long.

But he survived.

Oh, survival wasn't hard, at first. He had the supplies he'd taken off the boat; he could eat for a month or so. His first major worry was shelter. There weren't any trees on the island, so he couldn't build himself a shack. He tried to weave something out of bushes, but he didn't have the knack. He finally dug himself a shallow cave in the little hummock—you couldn't call it a hill—in the middle of the island. It wasn't much shelter, but it was something.

Food—after his supplies ran out—meant fish, when he could catch some. Fish for breakfast, lunch, dinner. Can a man live nine years on fish? Carl Marney did. When he could catch them, he ate fish; when he couldn't he went hungry. For the first six or seven years he cooked them and then ate them. The last two or three years he just ate them.

It wasn't too bad for a while. For the first few months he had things to keep him busy. And he had hope. He kept a beacon fire going at night on top of the hummock as a signal to ships. But then he realized that there wasn't going to be enough brush on the tiny island to keep that fire going, and he had to stop. Besides, there weren't any ships. He didn't see one for nine years. Whatever ships rounded the Horn went well inside or outside of that island.

There were storms, frequent rains. There was baking heat from the sun and there was intense cold. He had little in the way of creature comfort.

But—the poem. He had a keen mind and a marvelous education. When he'd been on the island a few months—long enough to realize that it *might* be a long time before he was rescued—it came to him that he must do something to keep from going mad—at least to keep from going dull and stale and animal-like.

He had writing materials from the boat, and he set about writing a poem. Not poems, he decided, but one great poem, one that would epitomize—well, the *love of life* that he felt so strongly, that he felt even more strongly in his temporary isolation and deprivation. It was to be something along the lines of the Rubiyat, but without the gentle melancholy and bitter undertone of that hedonistic masterwork. It was to be rhymed and metrical, in quatrains.

YOU must remember, you must keep in mind, that he had *time.* Even the few things—mostly fishing—that he could find to do did not occupy his mind while they occupied his body. He had the mind, the ability, the background, the sensitivity, everything that a poet needs to write a great poem, and he had *time,* all the time there was. He could spend a day, a week, a month if necessary, polishing a single quatrain. He could find the right word, then a better one, then the perfect one—the one that combined perfection of sound with perfection of imagery.

He worked on that poem almost nine years, and he finished it.

But meanwhile, so that you can understand the development and evolution of that poem, you must understand some other things that were happening.

He had the radio—a receiving set only; the boat had been too small a one for the two-way sets that existed in the nineteen twenties—and it still worked after he had rigged it up in the cave. He had a considerable knowledge of chemistry and was able to find certain mineral substances that enabled him to keep his batteries charged, after a fashion. He couldn't, of course, have repaired a tube had one blown out or worn out, so he limited himself to half an hour's use of the radio out of every twenty-four. And then only late at night in clear weather when the hearing was good.

He couldn't waste the precious life of those tubes on entertainment; he concentrated his listening on the spot news programs that kept him abreast of what was going on in the world. He learned of his own disappearance at sea and the brief search that was conducted for him—with planes flying along the coast line of Cape Horn and a bit each side of it, hundreds of miles away.

A year and a half later he learned that his fiancee—the daughter of the earl, had married a prominent American career diplomat. At least, he reflected bitterly, she'd been true to America.

That news had thrown him into a bit of a tailspin; he'd torn up most of the twenty-odd quatrains he'd written of the poem, and, salvaging a line here and there, had written them over again. There was a touch of cynicism in them.

The touch was more than a touch; it was growing into bitterness by the time—late in 1929—when he learned of the stock market crash. He knew then that he wasn't rich any more—if he ever got back. When he learned, a few months later, that the man who had had charge of the Marney estate in his absence had joined the procession of brokers who were walking on air out of skyscraper windows, he knew that he wasn't even solvent any more. Literally, he wouldn't have a penny.

That was when he'd been there three years. The prospect of poverty, though, didn't bother him as much as the loss of his sweetheart had. Either was bad enough, but he knew he was equipped to earn a living—even in the deep depression the radio told him about—and he knew that, even as a penniless young wage earner, he might find another woman whom he might love and who might love him. All wasn't lost.

He managed to keep that note of hope shining through the changing form of the poem, through the bitterness that had become its predominating motif. It wasn't the same poem at all, now after three years, that it had started out to be, but it was still a great poem, maybe a greater one because it was a truer one, a more realistic reflection. It had changed in form to free verse; the artificiality of rhyme and meter had palled upon him. He concentrated on cadence, working, polishing, perfecting—while the days and nights fell upon him like the drip of drops in the water torture.

He'd given up hope, now after four years, of ever being rescued. If no ship came this way in four years, probably none would come in forty.

His radio finally died a natural death, and he lost all touch with the outer world.

But he still kept working on the poem, the great poem. Not, now, because he hoped to gain fame or recognition from it. It had become an end in itself, a thing that kept him going, that gave meaning to the cold and hunger and loneliness, gave expression to them.

His health and strength were going now. You wouldn't have recognized him from one of the newspaper pictures that had appeared so often five years before. He was emaciated and he suffered terribly from scurvy as a result of his all-fish (and not too much of that) diet. He'd tried eating leaves of the bushes of the island, seaweed, but everything he tried had poisoned him a little. He suffered wracking pain from dysentery almost constantly. After five years on the island, he was twenty-eight, and looked nearer to fifty.

But he survived.

The poem, the great thing that he was doing—if only for himself—kept him going and kept him alive. He'd decided on a shorter form, a strictly limited length and was trying to pack into that everything that he felt. Concentration. The bitter couplet. Yes, he'd gone back to rhyme and meter for a while. A poem—he had it finished almost to his satisfaction—of forty-eight lines, twenty-four cruel couplets that tried to wring out the last drop of venom from a poisonous world.

IT WAS six years now. Maybe by then he was going a little mad—except about the poem; he remained sane to the end about that.

He kept working on it, improving it rather than lengthening it. His supply of paper was running low now, so he did his work on sand with a stick until he was satisfied—temporarily—and then and only then would he transfer the written word to one of his remaining sheets of paper. Always, when he revised, he destroyed what he had written before; he didn't want the ghosts of former versions to haunt him; he wanted only the shining perfection of the best he had done to date.

It was seven or eight years—he'd rather lost track of time by then—when it came to him that he no longer *wanted* a boat to come. Never, now, would he want to go back and face again people he once knew. Partly because of the tropical diseases, you see. He was thirty or thirty-one

then, and he was an old man, a slightly cracked old man, and a hideous one. He'd lost his teeth and his bald skull was cracked like pottery from the sun and his body was almost a skeleton, a naked skeleton. All his clothing had long since worn out. His skin was like rotting leather. He weighed about eighty pounds—and he was a tall man.

He'd lost his hair, his teeth—other things—but his mind went last. It went after his strength and his love of life and his hope. It concentrated on the poem and kept itself alive.

Distillation. It had come down to that now. He cut and pruned to combine two couplets into one; then to put the very essence of everything into a single quatrain, a master quatrain that would be the key to all expression. Slowly starving, dying, going mad, he survived by trying it in a hundred forms, none of them quite perfect.

A couplet, perhaps. He tried that, worked on it, and tore up the quatrains when he had almost what he wanted. Distilling, always, down to the drop of essence.

Yes, the ship finally came, but he had finished his poem first. He had finally discarded the couplet form, Rupert Gardin told me, as he refilled my glass with iced tea, just a short while before the ship came and rescued him.

He'd distilled it finally to the final drop, the ultimate essence, the single syllable. He had it! Perfect at last, the expression of all that had happened to him. He shouted it in a high, cracked voice at the sailors in the dinghy as they neared the shore. He shouted it often, thereafter, but never any other word. Only the great poem that he and nine horrible years had made.

And Rupert Gardin, the dean of American critics, leaned close to me in his hotel room and recited the poem, the untitled poem, a single word of four letters . . .

I still remember, after these years, the thrill I got when I went back to the office, wrote that story, and turned it in. I still remember waiting to see it in print, knowing for sure it would get me my first by-line, and I remember the disappointment and then anger when I came across the story the next day, just the story of the interview buried on page eight and without a by-line. There wasn't any mention of Carl Marney.

I headed for the office of the city editor, stood fuming at his desk, and when he looked up I told him I'd quit.

He grinned a little. He said, "Go out and have a beer and then come back and I'll hire you again, maybe. While you're there figure out how Rupert Gardin knew what happened on the island if Marney never said anything after he came off except his poem. Gardin took you for a ride, kid."

I said all I had to say without even opening my mouth, and the city ed chuckled. He said, "Get the hell out of here and have that beer," and I did.

Over the beer, while the redness went out of my face, I repeated Carl Marney's poem softly to myself, and suddenly I laughed out loud and the bartender turned and looked at me. And I think that with that laugh I quit being a cub and became a reporter, because I've never believed anything since—except Carl Marney's poem.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

SLEEPING in the snow.

Query:—I would like some dope on winter camping. Will a 5 lb. cotton-filled sleeping bag keep you warm? What do you suggest for snow or cold weather?

—E. A. Brown, Jr.
115 E. H Street
Elizabethton, Tenn.

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—Sorry, but I can't get enthusiastic about a cotton-filled sleeping bag for winter or any other outdoor use, regardless of weight. The trouble lies with the material. Cotton will absorb the moisture ever-present in the outdoors, and become clammy under the best of circumstances. When damp, it becomes an excellent conductor, and will carry heat away from the body, rather than confining it. Also, it has a very objectionable tendency to mat down in use, and in losing its elasticity also loses its capacity as a non-conductor of heat.

You see, the very best of all materials for a sleeping bag is one that is light and fluffy, for it is the dead air spaces rather than the material that does the work, dead air being the best of non-conductors of heat. Hence it is that down, not feathers, is right at the head of the list. Best substitute is wool.

If you are planning to make your own bag, the simplest way is to construct a wool filled comforter about 72 x 84 inches, using a tightly woven cotton material, not water-proofed, for the covering, and about five pounds (for winter use) of lamb's wool batting for the filling. This can be bought from the mail-order houses. Get the plain batting, not the cheesecloth covered variety. This only adds weight and serves no purpose.

Fold this comforter down the middle the long way, and sew across the bottom and half-way up the side. Finish the remainder of the side with a zipper, buttons or tapes.

One big thing about sleeping warm is to have your bed so insulated from the ground that the chill of the earth can't get to you. My favorite is an air mattress, carried in a roll and inflated for use. This is a little heavy if one has a big pack, though. A foot of straw, hay, leaves, etc., will help wonderfully if dry. In extreme weather, one can build a log fire and then, when the ground is well heated, rake the fire away and make his bed where it has been. *Be sure every coal is removed!*

A DOWNY bed is fine—but not milkweed.

Query:—In our locality we have an abundance of milkweed. I have often wondered if milkweed down would be satisfactory as insulation in a sleeping bag. How would it compare with wool? Would it be apt to lose its insulation value rapidly in packing down? I enjoy making my own tackle and camping equipment but would like an expert opinion before I experiment.

—Ed. T. Murphy
317 Hutchinson Ave.,
Syracuse 7, N. Y.

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—Following the receipt of your letter I went out and gath-

ered a handful of milkweed down to check my recollection of it. From all that, I'd be prone to place it somewhere in the class with kapok as sleeping bag filling—and I've always considered that as close to the bottom of the list, as being prone to pack, and not being a very good non-conductor of heat at that. Like yourself, I'm a confirmed experimenter in the home manufacture of camping equipment, but believe I'll stick to wool for summer temperatures and down for colder nights.

LOVE life of the bass and bream.

Query:—Do bream and bass spawn in any particular phase of the moon? If they do, what phase?

—W. Fred Gunn, Dean
Bessie Tift College,
Forsyth, Ga.

Reply by John Alden Knight:—While I had my own ideas on the subject, I felt that it would be wiser to obtain some substantiating opinion before replying to you. Accordingly, I now have the opinions of Dr. Francesca LaMonte of the American Museum of Natural History and Dr. Reeve M. Bailey, Associate Curator of Fishes at the University of Michigan. These two outstanding authorities agree that the spawning of bass and bream is controlled almost completely by temperature. Certainly that is true in northern latitudes and all evidence points to the fact that existing temperatures are the major control of spawning activities regardless of the territory in question. In other words, as soon as the waters warm to approximately sixty-five or sixty-seven degrees in the spring of the year, spawning activities begin more or less regardless of moon phases.

There is this point to consider, however, although there is no available research on the matter. We know, and by "we" I mean, in the editorial sense, that all wildlife, fish included, are more keen, alert and active during the dark of the moon and the first quarter. There is no doubt in my own mind that should temperature conditions be favorable at this time, spawning would proceed with more celerity than is normal: As I say, I have no research or background for this assertion except general observations on wildlife activity during this phase of the moon.

MOUNTAIN lions in Arizona.

Query:—A friend and I have been discussing hunting of mountain lion in Arizona.

What we would like to know is where, when, and what to take. I have a German "98" Mauser rifle, 8mm, ammunition 170 grain, SP bullet, and my friend has a 30-30 Marlin. Are these rifles adequate for our purpose?

About how much time should we take, and what should we figure on in the way of dogs, horses, and a guide? What would it cost? We would have to watch expenses fairly closely as we are not in a position to spend a great deal of money.

How about hunting licenses, bounties, etc.? Can you help steer us to a guide?

—Clare T. Moore
c/o Santa Fe Reading Room,
Barstow, California

Reply by A. H. Carhart:—I'll not be able to give you specific information on every point, but I may be able to help you get going on your lion hunt.

Without the most recent Arizona bulletins at hand, it is my best judgment that the open season on mountain lions is year-round. They're generally classed as predators in all western states. So no closed season. You can go lion hunting any time in the year. But a good pack of hounds is practically indispensable.

Occasionally someone sees a big cat slipping by in the shadows, but I must confess that in nearly thirty years traversing the Rockies, I never have seen a mountain lion merely by traveling through a section. I've had cats follow my trail, seen their tracks later, but never seen one. They do this following out of curiosity, wanting to know what goes on in their territory. With all the tall stories about lions attacking humans, so far as I have knowledge there are on record only three instances of actual attack on people.

Your hounds need a fairly moist ground to follow scent. Dry ground will not take and hold scent so well. That means that you will want to plan your trip some time when there is snow, not the heat that will dry out earth after even a fair rain. So most of the hunting is done from now on into April and again in the autumn.

There are a number of lion areas in Arizona. The big cats like broken country, cliffy areas, and most of the foothills in that state are potential cat territory. The Grand Canyon country and north of there is rather famous for mountain lion hunting.

A more helpful way of approaching where you hunt would be to ascertain where you might tie up with a good lion man and his hounds. That would probably indicate the exact place to hunt rather than mere potential cat territory. If you had to transport a pack of hounds it would add to cost of the trip, but it is likely you'll find packs located in lion territory simply because that is a good place to operate.

It is a bit of a job to locate a good pack of lion hounds and arrange for a trip. There are not many really top packs, well balanced between trained trailers and tree dogs. The best suggestion I can make to help you on this is to drop a line to two men who know Arizona well, and ask them to drop you a line suggesting whom to contact. They are K. C. Kartchner, former head of the Arizona game department, now with the Fish & Wildlife Service at Albuquerque, and Roy Gam-

brell, of the Arizona G&F, at Phoenix. Ask them to name someone to contact. I'm sure they will direct you to reliable people.

The cost of a hunt for lions is comparatively high. It involves the guide-hunter, his pack, a camp helper in all probability, and the horses and equipment. There is occasionally a chance to throw in with a government lion man who is out on an assignment, stand your share of net costs, help around camp, and get a good hunt that way. But unless you have a personal, friendly tie-up with such a man, and get clearance, it is a long chance. As to rates, I haven't exact information on this; a lot of factors such as how far back in wilderness you have to go, whether or not you hunt from headquarters of a ranch or have to set up camp, and the like, enter in. I'd rather not take a wild guess at this point, with unknown factors and dealing with another fellow's business.

As to the time required, sometimes you'll jump a lion in the first hour. Another time, only after several days. They get away, and you have to pick up the trail again, maybe taking a day to cross-cut it. And so on. At least ten days in the field should be allowed, even in good lion territory.

Your Mauser and the .30-30 Marlin are wholly adequate as arms. After all, you tree the cat, are at close range, aim at a vital spot —and that's it. Even lighter calibers are adequate. A gun I once bought to go lion hunting was a .25-35.

Using your Mauser, you'll probably want to get some softnose or hollow point loads. Practically all states have laws against the use of solid point bullets. Whether they apply the requirements for these to predator hunting, I'm not certain, but you'd be safe with a hand full of hollow points or softnose loads.

Lion hunting in the west is one of the most exciting of all sports. But with all that you need, men, horses, hounds and camp equipment, it can't be done cheaply. Except if you get a tie-in with someone going lion hunting anyway, throw in on a share basis, and get that sort of a break. But if you do get a big cat, you've gotten about one of the rarest of western trophies.

Good hunting!

THE dip *versus* the waggle.

Query:—Just how does an aviator dip his plane's wings—and why? Does he do so only to indicate he is in trouble or on other occasions?

—Byron Walters,
Route 3, Box 425,
San Jose, Calif.

Reply by O. B. Myers:—A pilot dips his wings—or as it is more commonly put, "waggles" his wings—by shoving his control stick first to the right and then to the left, without affecting rudder or elevator controls, this gives the airplane first right aileron and then left aileron, making it tilt on its longitudinal axis first to the right and then to the left, just as you would rock a boat by putting your weight first on one gunwale and then on the other.

In the days before radio communication, it was almost the only way of giving or acknowledging a signal. Unless specifically agreed on beforehand, it conveys only a general meaning; to indicate awareness of another plane, to draw attention, or to acknowledge receipt of a message. For example, a small plane without radio equipment coming in to land must await the green light from the control tower. When the light is flashed, the pilot waggles his wings; this lets the tower know that he has seen it and will act accordingly. However, if the plane flew around close to the tower waggling his wings repeatedly, the tower operator would figure that something was wrong somewhere, and would take steps to find out what.

Hope this helps out your flight technique.

THE Golden Royale.

Query:—What can you tell me about the Bugatti "Golden Royale" car which was produced about 1928? Only twenty were made in this series. Have you any information as to where they are now? Their specifications, records of performance, etc.?

—Charles D. Palmer
3323 Dearborn,
Sioux City, Iowa.

Reply by William Campbell Gault:—I was in Miami in '27 and '29. One of those two years, I talked to a Bugatti owner and rode in his car, a low slung job, about as high as a man's waist. It had to be shipped to Florida, I remember, because the road clearance was so low it would not clear on some of the high-crowned dirt roads of the South. In 1927, the Big European 200-miler was won by a Bugatti, M. Campbell driving it at an average speed of 76.62 m.p.h. The Italian Grand Prix was won by M. Chiron in a Bugatti at an average speed of 99.35 and in 1926 Charavel won the same race with a Bugatti at an average speed of 85.57. Chiron won in '28.

1923 seemed to be a year of Bugattis at Indianapolis. Prince de Cystria drove one to ninth place in the 500 at an average speed of 77.64 m.p.h. This was an eight cylinder job with a 2.362 bore and a 3.468 stroke, giving it a total piston displacement of 121.75 cubic inches. This was one of the years when the limitation was 122 cubic inches, so these Bugattis, of course, were special jobs. Pierre de Viscaya finished 166 laps in that race in a Bugatti and other cars of this make in the race were driven by Count L. Zoborowski—41 laps. Raoul Riganti—19, Martin de Alsaga—6. There was a Bugatti entered in the 1927 500, but it did not start.

In 1928 Bill Cantlon entered a Bugatti in the same race, but again it didn't start the race, having failed to qualify.

But what happened to those Golden Royales is something I couldn't discover. It would be an even bet that at least half of them are still running, and driven with pride.

(Anyone else able to add any information about those famous old racing cars? We remember 'em too and can guess such a relic might be a mighty handy vehicle to fall back on when the family sedan, vintage of 1940, collapses, as it undoubtedly will before we go to press.—K.S.W.)

SCHOOLS for horses and horsemen.

Query:—I am retiring from the army within the next few months and expect to settle somewhere in the East, probably near the Great Smoky Mountains. I want to keep a few riding animals and possibly a couple of well bred mares and raise and school a colt occasionally. I have Arabian or American saddlers in mind.

I am entitled to full educational benefits under the GI Bill and had considered studying horsemanship, breeding, schooling, including gaiting, dressage and tricks, first in the United States then finish with a year abroad, possibly in Italy.

Any information that you may be able to give me as to schools qualified to fill my needs and recommendations of "horsey" books for my library will be greatly appreciated.

—M/Sgt. James F. Stephens,
H.Q.Det., 3rd Bn., 22nd Inf.
Fort Ord, Calif.

Reply by John Richard Young:—Your search for a school of horsemanship, I'm afraid, may not be very successful; and your desire for such schooling, which experience has convinced me is shared by many other persons, serves me as an excuse to harp on a favorite topic of mine—that in all these United States, so far as I know, there is not one school which can give you the kind of teaching you evidently want to have.

There are thousands of livery stables where you can receive simple lessons in elementary horsemanship; much more elementary than, I presume, you would be interested in. There are veterinary schools where you can learn the medical facts and theories. I've heard of a college—I think it was the University of Michigan—where interested young men could learn the art of horseshoeing. Most of our state universities include animal husbandry in their agricultural courses. There are a few correspondence courses on training and schooling horses—you study at home and practice on your own horses. But nowhere in this country, that I know of, is there a *real* school of all-round horsemanship and there never has been, and probably never will be unless some multimillionaire with a real genius for organizing finances it. If ever that miracle comes to pass, he'll get his investment back with interest, for you are not alone; but until it does happen, I'm afraid, you'll have to learn the way most of us do—the hard way.

There are plenty of skilled horsemen in this country who could, *if they would,* teach you all you'd ever need to know on specific phases of horsemanship—such as training colts, gaiting, jumping, etc., including circus trick stuff and even—a very, very few men—genuine high school. (Don't confuse that with dressage.) But I just don't know of any place where you could learn them all, going through a complete course in horsemanship and horsemastership. For one thing, such a "university" would need a faculty of at least one genuine expert in each specific branch of horsemanship. Such men would deserve, and demand, salaries which would add up to real money. Who would pay them? The school would also need good horses of various types in all stages of training, from green colts to finished high school mounts (and I mean *real* high school, not the circus nonsense so-called). It would need a complete staff tightly organized under a capable director who was himself a competent all-round horseman which would make even the finest livery stable or hunt club of today seem, in comparison, hayseedy and strictly bush league.

Great Britain has been trying to organize something like this through the Institute of the Horse—a central school of horsemanship which would include, in the most efficient and modern methods, every branch of riding; graduates of the school, St. George's, returning to their homes as qualified, endorsed teachers, complete with certificates. And the whole story of St. George's is just one protracted series of headaches, arguments, quarrels, dissensions and general bitterness. Almost nobody agrees with anybody else how the school should be run, how much tuition should be charged, etc., etc.

I have contacted the local Veterans Administration in an effort to learn just what sort of setup you're up against. They tell me that while your choice of subject is O.K. with them, you will have to find your own school (if you were receiving a disability pension they'd do that for you). I don't know where you'll ever find it; I've wished for years that I knew of such a place and could afford to run one.

The best I can suggest is that you contact professionals in the phases of horsemanship in which you are most interested and persuade them to take you on as a pupil, perhaps on an on-the-job training basis (but remember that you'll have to sell your idea to more than one professional, for a horseman who could teach you jumping from A to Z might be able to teach you almost nothing about gaiting and vice versa). Then inform the V. A. of the complete setup for its approval. California is full of horse trainers who cater to the movie industry, others who train show horses, many who school mounts for wealthy *Californios* who like nothing better than to ride in parades loaded down with silver equipment. California, in fact, is as much a horseman's paradise as it is a cultist's—and often it's difficult to distinguish between the two.

You can find almost anything in California—and if your taste runs to fancy foofaraw you'll find most of it there.

In Boise, Idaho, (R.F.D. No. 1) Charles O. Williamson (D.V.M.) runs a training stable for horses, specializing in gaiting and finishing riding mounts. Perhaps you could find an opening there.

Two correspondence schools in horse-training which you might want to investigate are: Animal Lovers Association, Box W-111, Tarzana, California and Beery School of Horsemanship, Dept. 4511, Pleasant Hill, Ohio.

As for books, there are hundreds of them, ranging from excellent to lousy. Go into any large book store and you'll probably find more than you'll want or ever read. Here are a few recommendations: "Horsetraining: Outdoors and High School" by E. Beudant; "Be a Better Horseman" by S. Kournakoff (?); "Principles of Equitation" by Barretto de Souza; "Training and Gaiting" by Earl Farshler; "Schooling Hunters, Jumpers and Hacks" by H. D. Chamberlain; "The Horse America Made" (Saddlebreds) (I forget this author's name. Write to the A.S.H.A. in Louisville, Ky., for it.); "Blood of the Arab" by A. W. Harris, 111 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.; "The Horse of the Desert" by R. W. Brown; "The Horseman's Encyclopedia" by Margaret Cabell Self; all the following books by M. F. McTaggart: "Hints on Horsemanship," "The Horse and His Schooling," "The Art of Riding," "From Colonel to Subaltern," "A Handbook for Horse-Owners"; "The Points of the Horse" by Horace M. Hayes.

I shall be interested in knowing how your plans turn out. If I can give you any further information, do not hesitate to ask.

RCMP statistics.

Query:—I wonder if I can have the answers to the following questions regarding the RCMP?

(1) When was the RCMP founded—and by whom?
(2) How many arrests did the RCMP make in 1946? How many convictions did they get?
(3) How many murders did they investigate in 1946? How many did they solve?
(4) How many fingerprints have they on file?
(5) What is the total force of the RCMP?
(6) How much are RCMPolicemen paid per year?
(7) How many RCMP were killed on duty since its founding?
(8) Where is the main headquarters of the RCMP located?

—Joseph C. Stasulewicz
45 Lafayette Street,
New Britain, Conn.

Reply by H. S. M. Kemp:—1. The RCMP was originally founded as the North-West Mounted Police in 1873 by the Canadian Government.

2. I cannot say how many arrests were made in 1946 as the figures are not yet available nor the number of convictions, but there were 1700 more investigations in 1945 than in 1944. The total investigations for 1945 were 25,886.

3. In 1945, the Police investigated 23 murders, with 22 persons being involved. Of these, 4 were executed or are awaiting execution, 1 drew life imprisonment, against one the charge was reduced, one was insane, three committed suicide, five were acquitted, three are awaiting trial, and the remaining four cases are still under investigation.

4. There are approximately 900,000 fingerprints on file at Headquarters.

5. The Force was composed of 2556 officers, n.c.o.s. and men in 1945, with an additional strength of 588 special constables and employed civilians.

6. Basic pay in the police is: constables, up to $2.75 per diem; corporals, $3.00; sergeants, $3.75; staff-sergeants, $4.00—4.50. In addition, such men receive board, uniform, medical attention, the benefits of a pension plan and certain other pay-allowances.

7. 25 men have been killed in the Force since its inception in 1873.

8. The Headquarters of the RCMP is in Ottawa, Ont.

INCA treasure trove—"Big Fish"—"Little Fish."

Query:—Can you tell me anything about prospecting and treasure hunting in Peru? A friend who was born and raised in that country tells me of the possibilities of finding gold of the Spaniards and Indians. Is there really still considerable of such wealth left there?

—R. H. Schroeder
259 Hamilton Ave.,
Staten Island 1, N. Y.

Reply by Edgar Young:—Ever since the Conquest, during which great quantities of gold were sent back to Madrid, people have engaged in hunting *huacas*, or hidden treasure, in Peru. The main finds have been in the vicinity of Cuzco, the old Inca capital; at the old capital of the Gran Chimu, near the present coast city of Trujillo; and the site of another "holy city" of another race about twenty-five miles from the city of Lima. Not only has gold actually been found in considerable quantity, but other relics in good condition—"whistling ducks," images, etc., which are very valuable to antiquarians.

The major portion of the gold that filled the galleons which headed south for the trip around Cape Horn, or to Panama to be packed across the Isthmus to be shipped from the east side, came from the Sun Temple at Cuzco in the form of images which were sacred to the Sun God, gold plates from the walls, gold tile from the roof of this temple and the Inca palaces, and such utilitarian things as pots, pans, and drain pipes. Gold was only collected as a sacred metal because it was yellow and resembled the color of the

sun and the amount in Cuzco at the time of the Conquest was the result of many hundred years of collecting by the two million subjects of the Incas (present day Quechuans). The ruling Inca (Atahuallpa) was away from the capital and taking the baths at Cajamarca when he was taken prisoner by Pizarro and his ruffians. They said they would free him if a large room, or hall, was filled with gold the height of a man and a half from the floor. This was done by the Indians, but Pizarro then had the Inca strangled, and the account of this by an eye-witness is one of the most blood-curdling incidents to be found in print.

The next greatest single find was the "little fish" treasure, about eight miles inland from the present city of Trujillo, which, according to authentic accounts, seems to have contained about two million dollars' worth of gold in the form of images to the Sea God, mainly fish and other marine creatures. The Indian chief who told the Spaniards where to locate the "little fish" deposit was double-crossed out of his portion by them, and, due to this, he failed to reveal the location of the "big fish" *huaca*, which was supposed to have contained many times more. The ruins of the old capital of the Gran Chimu, due to desert conditions, is still in fairly good preservation.

Many smaller *huacas* containing a few thousand dollars' worth of gold have been found up to fairly recent times. When I was there it was open season on the old graveyards and I saw parties of tourists not only carrying away golden rings, ornaments, images, "whistling ducks," etc. but also artificial eyes they had gouged from the heads of mummies, and even arms, legs, and heads of the corpses, and these parts of human cadavers went to England, Germany, and here to the U.S. Lapidaries on Maiden Lane tried to polish the artificial eyes (which had been made by pumping some sort of animal eye full of a chemical) and many of the workers almost lost their sight from the dust.

It was only after the old graveyards had been gutted and most of the valuable curios in the hands of foreign collectors, that Peru decided to do something about it, and about fifteen years ago they stationed guards on the site of the old ruins and burial grounds. I don't know if they are there yet or not, possibly not, for not long ago I learned that valuable curios are still coming out.

So far as gold in seams and in alluvial deposits is concerned:

The Quechuan subjects of the Incas were constantly looking for gold and they were expert miners in their crude way. If they found an outcrop of quartz which contained a tiny thread of gold they would "gopher" after it, crawling back considerable distances to follow it. When we take into consideration that two million of them had been collecting it for centuries, it stands to reason they had got all that was near the surface in all parts of the Empire. There is at present some alluvial gold in the streams on the eastern slopes of the Andes, and a few mines are being worked; but it is my opinion that the big deposits will take *deep prospecting* to locate. In other words it is no use to go scratching about over in there with a pick and shovel but it is a case of taking in drills capable of testing the ground for hundreds of feet in likely locations, and by using the best geological information to locate the places where gold is most likely to be. An old experienced, or young and brilliant, geologist should accompany any prospecting party, and if he was too lazy to work he would be worth his keep by just studying the formations and announcing his conclusions. I do not mean to intimate that these geologists are non-workers for I have seen a few who would work like a house afire when they saw colors in the pan.

If you will take a trip on the ferry across to New York and read what the New York Public Library has on Peru, you will obtain some valuable information. "Along the Andes and Down the Amazon" is a good one to start on.

PRIMITIVE sea-plumbing.

Query:—Two ex-naval officers (RCNVR) a bottle of Scotch and myself got discussing odd army and navy expressions and their probable genesis.

We arrived at conclusions satisfactory to ourselves (but not necessarily correct) for all but one. "Heads" for toilets have us stymied.

Heads is used in the RN, RCN, and USN. It is surmised that it probably comes from the British navy before the Revolution. Can you help us out?

This is a matter of paramount unimportance, but it intrigued us just the same. Anything you can furnish that will augment our erudition will be gratefully accepted.

—T. Smyth
1930 Rue Champlain,
Montreal, P. Q., Canada

Reply by Lieut. Durand Kiefer, U.S.N. Ret.:—The word "heads" as applied to sea-going toilets originated, as you surmised, in the old sailing ship days in the British Navy, when there were no toilets, as such, provided, and the sailors simply sat over a bob-stay or the sail-nettings that were rigged alongside the bowsprit in the bow, or "head" of the ship. A man feeling the call of nature, therefore, told his mates, "I'm going to the head," and "the head," it's been ever since, although the Navy eventually got around to rigging up a sort of a latrine affair, also in the head, and with the advent of the steamship, and plumbing, moved "the head" various places on the ship, at one time commonly locating it in the very stern.

GOLD from under-water gravels.

Query:—I would like your opinion of an idea of mine whereby I could get to gold that is lying at the bottom of a stream or river that is impossible to drain.

My idea is to use a caisson of about four feet in diameter and to work to a depth of about twenty-five feet. I have read a few books on prospecting and there do seem to be locations that can't be worked by the conventional methods. I have had quite a bit of experience in under-water construction, and I feel that if the above mentioned idea is practical I would be as well able to put it into operation as the next fellow.

If my idea is not as original as I have thought, would you be kind enough to give me the locations of the rigs where this type of work is going on. I will greatly appreciate any information you can give me on this type of operation.

—Oakley T. Broce
Blue stone Inn,
Lacy Spring, Va.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—Your idea of using a caisson to work placer gold on a stream bottom at some depth is ingenious; but, while you could reach bottom with it no doubt, it would prove very costly and the operating area in the auriferous gravels so restricted (4 feet) that even if your gravel was extremely rich the gold recovered would not repay costs involved, let alone any profit, so it isn't commercially practical. To explain:

In engineering there are two types of caissons; the "open" and "pneumatic." The open type is used for bridge piers, etc., where the water-tight compartment is filled solidly with stone and cement on the water surface, and as the increasing weight sinks it is added to until the solid mass rests upon bottom. The pneumatic caisson is the type you would have to use, in which water is kept out by compressed air and the excavating done in air locks, hence a compressor must be installed.

You may argue that a metal cylinder might be used at 25 feet depth, its weight keeping it down until bedrock is reached and its bottom edge may be air-sealed on bedrock. However, the high relative cost still is a factor and the operating area is too restricted for it to pay. Moreover, it is difficult to make the caisson remain vertical, particularly in moving water, and adjusting this adds much to the cost.

This shows why it hasn't been used by placer miners.

The placer gold in under-water gravels always had been an unsolved problem until about 15 years ago. The old-timers had to let such values go, for they didn't know how to recover it. Then, during the depression of the 1930's, an experimental "suction dredge" was used on a pool in the Feather River, Calif., with some success at 40-ft. depth. It still had some disadvantages, since the operating nozzle had only a very limited "gathering" area and had to be held close by a diver. But the operators did recover much of the gold in that pool, at a profit.

Next, C. B. Thompson of Seattle, Wn., devised a suction dredge using a nozzle he invented having a circle of "periphery jets" inside its suction point, which not only increased the suction area but also cleaned the gold. Standard pipe sizes were used to attach this patent nozzle; the discharge hose led to an ordinary sluice with riffles, and sluice-pressure pump & engine was mounted on a scow, with the suction hose and nozzle supported on a stiff-arm and sluice box tailings discharging at rear of scow. These were made in several sizes: 1½-inch nozzle, 2-inch, 3-inch, and 5-inch nozzles, the engine in each with increasing power up to 250-lb pressure. Operated to 20-25 ft of water on 3-inch size by one man on the scow tending engine—he also directing nozzle. These sold in States, Canada, and Alaska. One man, S. B. Gjerde, whose placer was on Similkameen River, used a 3-inch nozzle for 4-5 years with entire success. I saw him work his outfit. The 5-inch nozzle operated in 40 ft of water O.K.

But Thompson died and I haven't been able yet to locate his successor, if any. His Canada agent: W. J. Sherwood, 555 Howe St., in Vancouver, B. C. There also is the "Essick Suction Dredge"—a 2-man outfit powered by 1 h.p. gas engine with 20-25 ft suction & 40-ft pressure head. Capacity 3-5 cu. yds. an hr., with 225 gals. water a minute, wt. 200 lbs. Query the Yuba Mfg. Co. on this, at 351 Calif. St., San Francisco, Calif. This firm is headquarters for all types of placer dredges, etc.

SPLIT skis and leaky boots!

Query:—I have a good pair of solid hickory skis in good condition except that there is a crack running along the tail of one of the skis. The crack is about 3 inches long and seems to go right through the ski.

I can't afford a new pair of skis this year, and I'm afraid the crack might grow larger if I don't do something about it soon. Can you tell me any way to save the ski?

—Marjorie Robinson
Tamworth, N. H.

Reply by William C. Clapp:—The problem you describe in your letter is a fairly common one with many skiers. Once a ski is split and water gets into the opening you can have trouble with the ski.

One way to stop the split from going further is a fairly simple home work-bench job. This is done with two small pieces of steel edge from an old ski. Place the pieces of edge across the split and drill two holes which correspond to the holes in each edge. Four edge-screws will secure these edges in place and should stop the ski from splitting further.

There is a more difficult method of fixing split skis, but that should be done by a regular ski shop. This involves drilling through the entire ski and inserting a round, threaded metal "worm." Unless you have the proper tools for this latter operation I would not advise you to try it.

Query:—Can you tell me a good method of preventing leaking around the soles of ski boots. My boots are in pretty good shape,

not badly worn after only three years' use, but they are beginning to leak. Is there any preparation that will prevent this? I hope you will be able to help as I can't afford a new pair of boots this year.

—K. W. Goodwyn
522 E. 78th St.,
New York 21, New York

Reply by William C. Clapp:—One of the oldest and most discussed problems in skiing is the best way to water-proof boots. Everyone has some special treatment for this trouble, but one solution I've found seems to work out the best in this part of the country.

The quickest and easiest way to water-proof a boot is to paint the sole and seams with ordinary ski lacquer. This will keep a boot fairly dry for short periods, but I've found it dries the leather badly in the long run.

The best quick method of applying a water-proof coating is to paint the entire sole and all the seams with "Sole and Seam Sealer," which can be bought in all ski shops. This preparation will keep a boot in dry condition for a month or more, even if used every day.

However, the finest method of water-proofing I know is using wax. This is the most laborious job of the three, but it will keep a boot in good shape all year. You can melt bee's wax or regular ski wax with an electric iron and work the soft wax into both the sole and lower seam of each boot. If done correctly, this is the best agent against soggy, wet boots.

ELBOW-GREASE for a stiff shirt.

Query:—Can you tell me how to soften a buckskin shirt that has got wet and dried stiff? It was made by an Indian squaw.

—Russell Mott
Oakenpins,
Charlottesville, Va.

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—If, as you say, your buckskin shirt is real Indian-tan, the preparation to soften it is simply elbow-grease. Rub every bit of it between the hands, over a broomstick or a tightly stretched rope, etc., until it is soft and flexible again.

You see, real buckskin is not really tanned at all, but is rawhide wetted and rubbed dry, smeared with a decoction of deer brains (sometimes chopped liver is added), and wetted, then twisted and rubbed dry again and again until the fibres have been thoroughly broken and soft as cloth. After that it is smoked to close the pores and give it a tan to brown color. So prepared, if it should become wet in use, rubbing and twisting would restore it to its former condition. It may mean a little work, but it's the only way I know to do the job right, and is the one used by the Indians and old-timers who work buckskin. They frequently didn't trouble to do more of a job than just enough to let them get the garment on, depending on use to soften it up.

THE tri-tined caribou.

Query:—Does a caribou have three or two horns—or antlers, I suppose you'd call them? I once saw a caribou head mounted and am certain it had three horns. My pals tell me that the head got me or that I was drunk when I saw the head, but I know different. The caribou I am talking about are found in North America and belong to the reindeer group.

—Ben Organek
San Francisco, Calif.

Reply by A. H. Carhart:—You weren't bleary eyed when you saw "three antlers" on a North American caribou. But you didn't look close enough! The antlers come from two bases, but almost always one of the brow tines—the first branch on one of the horns; rarely both brow tines—swings toward the middle of the forehead and grows out into a form that looks for all the world like a third antler; it branches and spreads, with just that effect. That is what fooled you. Now it is a question whether or not you can resolve with your buddies whether this constitutes a third antler. Technically, there are only two bases to the antlers; actually this brow tine, the way it grows, does form what amounts to a third antler.

As further information, there are some four species, or rather varieties, of woodland caribou in North America, and three varieties of barren ground caribou that are far to the north. Also, the females, unlike others of the deer tribe, have antlers. You are perfectly correct in saying they are all part of the reindeer group.

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Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

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★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley, N. S. W., Australia.

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

Garcia Orgiva was not really Garcia Orgiva—he was Dave Coster, *Inglés*—but more Spaniard now than Englishman. He even thought in Spanish. During the Civil War, he had fought from Brunete to the Ebro with the *Brigadas Internacionales*—and after the German defeat in World War II he had returned to the land of his adoption to join the guerrilla forces which still waged endless war against Franco's Falange. He had enlisted himself as a citizen of Spain—not of the present hunger-and-terror-grained country, but of a future Spain, a distant Republic visible only in the minds of passionate and unbendable men. You will meet an unforgettable character next month in—

"OPERATION DYNAMITE"

By JAMES NORMAN

—in which Coster undertakes a mission as difficult as it is perilous, for Señor Ortiz, liaison agent for the *Junta Suprema*, secret organization to combat the dictatorship. The *turistas*—polite name for the Nazi technicians who in wartime had been as thickly imbedded in the pelt of the country as lice on a dog—were on the move again. Now a trainful of them, following a circuitous route through Asturias to the little port of San Esteban was to be halted by Coster. . . . "The train is to be wrecked?" . . . "Nay, *hombre*. No ordinary sabotage, this. The train must be destroyed, but completely—*no one must escape*. However," shrugged Ortiz, "the *Junta* is liberal." Though Coster was to travel alone and take nothing with him, he was, of course, free to choose the time and place. . . . Provided he took no more than six days for the operation!

Plus "Bluewater Bullion"—a smashing tale of undersea salvage pirates of the Indian Ocean by H. Fredric Young. . . . Another side-splitting Charley Hoe Handle story by Jim Kjelgaard in which that wily redskin poacher tangles once again with Warden Horse Jenkins. . . . "On the Beam"—a stirring yarn of the blizzard hopping bush pilots of the Alaskan wilderness wastes by Frank Richardson Pierce. . . . "The Hand of Danjou" by Robert Carse, another thrilling novelette of the French Foreign Legion in Mexico . . . "Harvest of the Sea" by Albert Richard Wetjen . . . And the usual interesting quota of informative fact features, departments and verse . . . This great MAY issue of—

ON SALE APRIL 9th

(Continued from page 6)

(a remittance man)—eighty-plus when I knew him; gone now. He knew Lobengula well, the M'sai tongue better, and was in the Matebele fracas. He also knew the Arab slavers—jointly sanctioned by the French, Spanish and Portuguese (all claimants)—in the Rio de Oro country.

Now—here's where and how I got "The Whip"—and a long way it is from the setting of the story!

In April, last, I made a trip into Sonora, Mexico—plotted with the aid of a friend, Ed Ketchum of the U.S. Customs Patrol—to explore a desolate, uninhabited volcano crater area. The plan was to set camp at the only sure water hole that time of year—a *tinaja* on the eastern perimeter of the lava beds—and hoof it in from there. This was to establish me for Ketchum in case I didn't show in a reasonable time; it's no one-man realm at any time and a death trap for all when the heat breaks.

The mesquite bottoms still held the tag ends of Mexican cattle that had ranged in through the winter—part of an 1800 head herd owned by two brothers. They watered at the *tinaja*. When I reached the tank, I found I had company—the most emaciated character I've ever seen, and the desert country is full of gaunt "lungers." He spoke some English but his Spanish, I noted right off, *was* Spanish; pure, soft Castilian. Later two riders came in. They were hazing the cattle back to the river (some 90 miles) before the heat struck, and were using the tank for headquarters. My emaciated friend was camp cook and general flunky.

This bird, stripped to the waist, was a shudder—a skeleton bound with shriveled parchment, with great scar valleys down his back. After the riders shoved off, at dawn, we squatted over coffee, and I dug out some canned peaches—from his cavernous look an obviously palatable contrast to the frijoles and garbanzas "con chili y tortillas" he'd been working on.

With little to say until now, he began to loosen up, with my prompting. As he did so, he pulled over a battered saddle and took up the carving of an intricate design he'd been working in the skirts. The story of "The Whip" followed, practically as I wrote it.

He called the place Puerto Blanco, referring to the tannery as an old casbah. It was "somewhere" on the Rio de Oro coast. (There's a Port Etienne next door to Cape Blanco at the southern edge of Rio de Oro. Maybe that's what the guy meant.—*Ed.*) He'd been shipped down from Spain during the uprising; some kind of two-by-four provincial official, I gathered. He'd escaped with some of the other inmates, reached a place in French territory described as a salt mine (which, I found later, jibed), then to a fishing boat. At that point he clammed up—so I don't know how he got to Mexico. There are countless refugees there.

And that's it, basically. I put in the overseer's driving motives. Who knows what happened in the Spanish War, still is happening? The Inquisition doubtless comes off a poor second to Franco's regime. There is an inherent cruelty in the Spanish, a cool politeness brewed in hot blood. In the Mexican strain they lay it to the Indian. Hell—I think the Nazis learned a great many of their tricks from the blue-blooded Dons in person! And yet, I hasten to add, there are no nicer people than the Spanish, when on the calm.

The yarn kept bothering me; I had to shed it. I began checking on Rio de Oro. Everybody looked at me blankly, including our long-term Carnegie librarians. But they were aroused and we dug, coming up with—nothing! The *"Encyclopaedia Britannica," "World Atlas"* and what-have-you notwithstanding. A place that blank struck me as safe for the setting; the tannery could have been an improvisation, as my *tinaja* friend seemed to hint—a convenient setting for a dastardly idea. So I went ahead and used it.

The man certainly had the physical evidence—laced back-work, intricate leather carving ability *et al* to fit. It rang pretty solid. And—I figured Franco wouldn't have given me any better break, so I banged away, the lack of information about the locale bolstering me still further. It had to be fiction because the guy himself, in clamming up on the escape, seemed to be the one who was on the spot.

As for anything about myself for *Camp-Fire,* I'm the kind of dead wood that always makes a smudge. For those who have never heard of the disaster of 1903—Greetings! Not a headline catastrophe, however, I have had to discontent myself with relegation to the non-Vital Statistics of the back page.

A Michigander, I've homesteaded in California (not the Rose Bowl), helped build its highways (but followed its trails), put up some of its metropolitan haciendas (preferring a mountain cabin), beat a set of night-club drums for a decade (heavy on the tom-toms), wrestled a school of cosmetology (heap many squaws, ugh!), taught ballroom dancing (with Hopi-Apache variations for free), wrote an interminable column for one paper, radio-theater paged another, and am at present editing a musical journal (with sunsets inserted). And other stuff, all of which carry bracketed appendages akin to those above—a heart-in-the-hills nostalgia that has left scarcely a foot of the Southwest and Mexico without my hoofprints. Few strains of its big game escape my rifle sights and fewer sharks my harpoon.

Camp-Fire's smudgin' out thar, ain't she? Wal, I warned yuh!

AND Ethan Grant, whose "Mr. Third Engineer" appears on page 116, introduces himself thuswise—

Born in the hills of East Tennessee, I lived in Texas and Oregon until I was 17, when I thought I had graduated from the School of Hard Knocks. Somehow I had managed to mix formal schooling with a lot of

work in hop yards, a lumber camp, as doff boy in a spinning mill, in a bakery and as a messenger. Finally I became a telegrapher. This was a white-collar job, paying $30 a month for 12 hours a night, 7 nights a week. After a few weeks, I gave it up and enlisted in the Navy as an apprentice seaman—age 17 years and one month.

Graduating from the U.S. Naval Radio School at Cambridge, I had my first sea experience aboard the U.S.S. *Democracy*, a supply ship, as a radioman. After being discharged from the Navy, I went into the Merchant Marine, where I served as radio operator on 14 ships, including a seagoing tug, a tanker, a number of tramps and finally as chief operator aboard a liner. Between trips I also was attempting to catch up on my education. I had a year of Law, two years of Business Administration and two years of Literature, from which I was graduated at the age of 28.

I then spent 10 years in an advertising office and edited a house publication for one of the big corporations in Detroit. In 1938 I resigned from that job to devote all my time to fiction. It was tough. I wrote 120 yarns before selling my first, the 121st. I had nicely got started when Hitler kicked over the traces and I went back to work for Uncle Sam. A month after V-J Day, I came back to Salem, Oregon, and my little downtown writing office with its extensive reference library. I'm still here and expect to remain, for I can't work anywhere else as I do here from early morning till 9 or 10 at night.

As for athletics, I swam two years on a Detroit team, for which I established three world's backstroke records, two of which still stand. The mile, which I held for 15 years, was broken a few years ago, but I still have the certificates for the 2 and 4-mile, the latter performance time being 1 hour, 12 minutes and 47 seconds. That's backstroke, and 'tain't easy, sir! I played both collegiate and semi-pro baseball, and coached that sport for four seasons. Last summer I was a local umpire, a very disagreeable chore, but I did want the experience—for a reason.

The little record book tells me that "Mr. Third Engineer" was Story #225. The hero, Luke Sturdy, is a prototype of a former Navy shipmate who not only could lick anybody on board but who was, I think, one of the most competent seamen I ever knew. He wasn't quite the same character as Luke Sturdy, except when things went wrong because of slovenliness and incompetency. The story itself was based on two separate incidents. On a big tramp once we carried naphtha in No. 2 hold to Montevideo. Then, on the run from Rio to Las Palmas, Canary Islands, we had a bunker fire such as described in the story. There were two differences, however: the naphtha had been discharged, and the skipper and chief engineer were smart enough not to open the hatch. The fire lasted several days, till we reached port and the fire boats.

So far as I know, I am the only writer currently attempting sea stories from an ex-radioman's viewpoint. Dick Wetjen, who lives in San Francisco, tells me he knows two other writers who are ex-radio operators, but that both are doing deck yarns.

FREDRIC BROWN, whose off-the-trail "Four-Letter Word" on page 123 marks his first appearance in our magazine, is a newspaperman currently on the staff of the Milwaukee *Journal*. In the past ten years, in addition to his regular journalistic chores on various papers around and about the country, he has sold over two hundred stories to magazines and written three novels, all published by Dutton, and is now well into a fourth. "The Fabulous Clipjoint" published last year was hailed by the *Saturday Review of Literature's* critic as one of the two best firsts in the mystery-novel field for 1947.

ROY S. TINNEY, our *Ask Adventure* expert on shotguns, who has moved recently to Brielle, N. J., writes enthusiastically from his new home—

> I find I can install a miniature indoor range in the house I have purchased and have located an outdoor range where I can continue my experimental firing, come fine spring weather.
>
> Now have facilities for tests I lacked when living at Chatham, including the old loose-load front-fed guns, short and long, flint and percussion. Trapshooting and Skeet layouts. The famous National Guard range maintained by the state at Sea Girt is within easy driving distance. Have shot there, off and on, since 1902. And having retired from the active practice of law, I will now have an opportunity to do a lot of things gunwise I have been wanting to try for the past thirty years. Will keep you informed of my progress for now I'll be in a position to render *Ask Adventure* queriers far better service.

STEVE FRAZEE, whose "Ghost-Mine Gold" continues to pay dividends in excitement if not calaverite as the story progresses, had a short article on hard-rock drilling—"Ninety Blows a Minute"—a few months ago. We were mighty pleased to get the following hail from one of the hammermen about whom Mr. Frazee wrote—

> Dear Sir:
>
> In the November 1947 issue of ADVENTURE, I read with interest the article on the old-time drilling matches, "Ninety Blows a Minute," by Steve Frazee.
>
> I was very pleased to see that Mr. Frazee

had such good information on what condition a man had to be in, the training, and time it took to make such hard-rock drillers. Many years of training and hard-rock work had to be accomplished to rank among the best.

No doubt Mr. Frazee, procured his information from some man who had been in the sport and knew all about the business, as it is the most complete description of the hard-rock drilling contests that I have read.

I am the Mike Kinsella whom Mr. Frazee mentioned in his article, who helped to drill the long hole in Hancock, Michigan in July 1911. Mr. Frazee stated that it was an exhibition and not a contest. Now that drilling match at Hancock, Michigan *was* a contest. There were at least ten teams who participated in it. The Butte, Montana team consisted of McLean, McCormack, and myself. McLean and I drilled fifteen minutes without interruption while McCormack twisted and changed the drills. We drilled fifty-nine and one-half inches in Vermont granite, the deepest hole that was ever put down by man-driven hammer.

Not mentioned in the article was another driller, Mike McNichols from Butte, Montana. He was one of the leading hammermen of the West having drilled in matches in Butte, Montana, Colorado, British Columbia, Spokane, Texas, Washington, and the Coeur d' Alenes.

Glad to see such a well written and entertaining article on the Hard Rock Drillers.

—Mike Kinsella
108 King St.
Wallace, Idaho

YOU readers are critical and quick to spot flaws and discrepancies—and we're plenty glad of it! It's one of the best ways we know to keep us and our Writers' Brigade on our respective toes so don't hold back. Witness—

Dear Mr. Gault:

Not knowing the address of Mr. Coleman Meyer, I am addressing you, as the *Ask Adventure* expert on Auto Racing.

I have been a reader of ADVENTURE for many years, since the days of ASH, in fact, and I have been actively engaged in the sport of automobile racing since 1912.

Lately I have read several stories by Mr. Meyer which were of interest to me, as he is evidently acquainted with the tracks on the Pacific Coast.

However, there is one term, used in all of Mr. Meyer's stories, which has me stopped dead. He constantly uses the expression "axle slack." For instance, at the bottom of page 66 (November) he writes "Tommy lifted his foot for axle slack," in his story "Hot-Rod Handicap."

You are, of course, cognizant of the fact that there is no such thing as "axle slack" in the modern racing car, due to the lack of a differential, as the axles are splined directly into a solid spool.

And even if "axle slack" were present, what would be the benefit of "lifting the foot" for it? I have heard numerous comments on this expression of Mr. Meyer, among the drivers and owners, and would appreciate an explanation.

—Walt Woestman
Woestman Racing Team
2310 Midlothian Drive
Altadena, Calif.
Member American Automobile Ass'n, Western Racing Ass'n, A.S.P.A.R.

Auto-racing Expert Gault promptly forwarded Racer Woestman's letter to Author Meyer and sent the following reply to Mr. Woestman—

Dear Mr. Woestman:

Received your letter, and thanks for suggesting that I might know something a man with your experience wouldn't, and about your specialty. Frankly, I haven't the faintest idea what Mr. Meyer could mean by "axle slack" but there are libraries all over the country filled with things I don't know. The local library knows no more about the term than we do: I checked that.

It occurred to me that it couldn't be differential backlash, because, as you say, the axles are splined into a solid spool. If a standard differential is converted, I understand, it is locked by the addition of spider gears fitted between the regular ones. Then, too, there'd be no percentage in "lifting the foot" for any play a standard unconverted axle might afford.

I noticed that the term is used just before the car goes into a curve, and I wonder if Mr. Meyer stretched his poetic license to mean the "slackening" or retarding effect of the motor's compression on the car's speed when the foot is lifted from the accelerator. But if he meant that, I'd want *his* word on it.

I'm forwarding your letter to Mr. Meyer, and I'm sure he'll answer your question. (I'd like to know, too!)

But I think you'll agree with me that it was still a good story!

And now comes Author Meyer's reply to Racer Woestman, Expert Gault and all concerned—

Dear Walt Woestman:

Thanks for pulling my head out of the sand re "axle slack."

If I remember right it came into my vocabulary back about 1922-23, give or take a year or so either way, when I used to hang around the fringes of the racing game with a hotted "T" that had three feet of play—not in the axle but in the splines. I've never even thought of the expression until your letter brought me up short and caused me to examine it.

I shan't offend you again and am considerably flattered at the mere fact that you even cared to comment upon the yarns.

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Incidentally, the statement in your letter to Gault ". . . . been around the racing game since 1912 . . ." interested me. I'm sure we must have some mutual friends for that length of time must, of a certainty, take in the old Oakland mile and the old San Jose 5/8's.

I think my best memory of San Jose takes in Leigh Green and that sheet-tearing Kant-Score Special of his. Later it took in a lot of other names of better note such as Ernie (Triplett) and all the rest of the gang who ran there as well as far better iron. But at this point, a good many years later my best memory is of Green, perhaps for no other reason than the racket his can set up on the stretches.

Of the old Oakland mile it isn't of drivers strangely enough: even though I was on the P.A. system when Bryan Salspaugh, Babe Stapp and Bill Cummings were names to conjure with. Rather, it's of Linn Mathewson—the sun-burned Santa Claus with short breath and an empty pipe who was forever between the devil of the driver's pay-off and the deep blue sea of the ticket office. Linn (I'm sure you knew him) is dead, incidentally. I bumped into Frank Hood a short while back and he told me Mathewson had passed away several months back.

Now that you've set me to thinking I've just realized that you can get around to a lot of places in twenty years of interest in speed. I was at the Salt Flats for a couple of weeks back before the war when Easton ran THUNDERBOLT. My cousin and I had built a streamline shell for a motorcycle that was going to do 175 (sic!). We spent two years building the damn thing and it scared me to death when Freddie Ludlow (Pasadena motor cop, know him?) went into a wobble at about 140. I've still got the shell and some memories of some funny things.

Everybody in Wendover, Utah, had a barrel of alcohol in his back yard and every waitress in the town could talk compression and cam action!

Then that show at Oakland; I can't quite remember the year. It was when Shaw, Stapp and everybody else with a name brought a troupe of two-seaters out from the bricks and barn-stormed the west here. Ten cars, everybody took an even split of the purse and the purse was a straight 50 percent of the gate. I remember that one well as Linn and I promoted it, took in about $8000.00 and lost $72.00 on the deal because the guy at the bank who was handling the tickets overpaid Shaw, who was the treasurer for the outfit! Ah, well . . . those were yesterdays. . . .

Anyhow, thanks a lot for your letter.

And no more "axle slack!"

Cordially,
Coleman Meyer

All of which above just goes to prove something we've been conscious of for a long time. ADVENTURE readers are a savvy crew and, to mix a metaphor, we've all got to keep up on those toes or get caught with out pants down!—K.S.W.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of James Mandow, please write to S. E. Purington, 57 Exchange St., Portland 3, Maine. The last time I heard from him was in 1945. He was in the army stationed in Japan and before that he was living in New York.

Anybody who knows Raymond F. Miller, U.S. C.G., 13th or Juneau District, Nome, Alaska, Box 281 (his last known address), please contact R. V. Webster, 1020 Post St., San Francisco 9, Calif. Miller's hobby is photography and he had a friend in Galveston, Texas, by the name of Elton W. Yancy.

Please address C. B. Stroud, Coral Ridge, Ky., Rt. No. 1, if you know anything about the following: An American flyer landed near Hohen Kemnath, Germany, April 9, 1945 and was taken to the hospital in Kastl suffering with a bullet wound in leg and burns on hands, arms, and face. About April 20, '45, he was moved to the second floor of the hospital at Amberg. About four days later an American lt. col. arrived in a jeep and talked to the wounded man. Two days after that he was taken by ambulance to an American hospital. Dr. Wilhelm Schmidt was in charge of one of the German hospitals. Lt. John D. Stroud, my son, has not been heard of since that time.

I will greatly appreciate contacting any of the following named men who were members of Troop D, 3rd U. S. Cavalry, stationed at Fort Assiniboine, Montana in the years 1903-1933—1st Lieut. Reginald McNally, (Com.), Sgt. Carl G. Day, Sgt. Lawrence Creekhaven, Egbert Ward, Corp. Nicholas Nusbaum, Thurston Thickston (Hosp. Corps), Pvt. Clyde R. Hess, Sam Standley, Clyde H. Shelmester, Ben C. Parrar or any other member of the above outfit. I hope to obtain information needed by the V.A. from the above. Please write Charles M. W. Burden, Box 128, Eddyville, Ky.

I would like to contact anyone who served on the LST 1033 during the time she was first commissioned until V-J day. H. L. Martin, Box 66, Ashland, W. Va.

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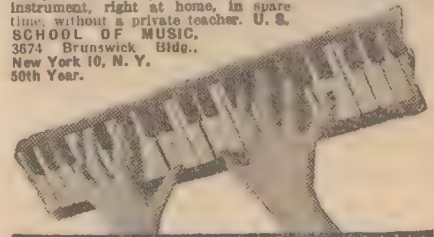

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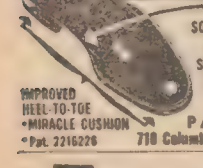

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I want address or information of my son, William (Bill) Andrew Clow; born at Carmen, Okla., Oct. 16, 1920. He is slightly deaf. Last heard of March 14, 1938 at Bellefontaine, Ohio. Said he was on way to Boston. Has lived at Cleo Springs, Okla. and El Centro, Calif. and towns in Arkansas. Please write Earl Clow, P.O. Box 684, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Will someone who was in Jap prison in Java from 1942 to 1944 who, perhaps, knew Seaman Moody C. Harrison, please write me. He was presumed to be lost when the Japs were moving him from Java in 1944. The ship was sunk by allies. C. L. Kitchens, 12 Maurice Ave., Simonsdale, Portsmouth, Va.

I would like to locate my father, Dewey Chaves Shiver, born March 28, 1901, at Lincoln, New Mexico. Has not been heard from since August, 1930. He has lived in San Francisco, El Paso, and Florida. In El Paso, he lived on Cotton, Erie, and Copper streets. He was in the Navy in 1917-1921, enlisting at Roswell, New Mexico. Please get in touch with Bill Shiver, Box 818, Oklahoma City, Okla.

P. J. Ferriere, Box 163, Commack, N. Y., wants to hear from any surviving crew members of the U.S.S. *West Over*, Army Cargo and Supply ship, which was torpedoed and sunk in the Bay of Biscay on or about July 21st, 1918.

I am anxious to contact my uncle, John Dunlop, native of Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia. He is of medium height, gray hair, and in his middle fifties, probably a salesman or an accountant. He was last seen in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1926. Charles Dunlop, 63 Pleasant St., Truro, Nova Scotia.

I would like to contact my buddy, Herbert C. Summers. We soldiered together with Co. C. 393rd Inf., 99 Div. I last saw him during the Battle of the Bulge, Dec. 16, 1944. His home is somewhere in Charleston, W. Virginia. Anyone knowing him please contact George O. Parker, 250 Columbia St., Cumberland, Md.

I am very interested in locating the following buddies of mine. We served in the 26th Regt., First Inf. Div., both in the states and the ETO; in England, Scotland, North Africa, and Sicily, where we were separated. S/Sgt. John Page, about 5′ 7″, 140 lbs., ruddy complexion, reddish brown wavy hair, square features, and about 33 years of age. Page is formerly of Jersey City, N. J. Sgt. George (Big George) Brighindi, 6′ 1″, 200 lbs., olive complexion, black wavy hair, plays guitar. He is from Bridgeport, Conn., about 29. T/Sgt. Arthur (Lippy) Lippman, dark complexion, black thinning wavy hair, about 5′ 6″, slender build, from New York City, is about 32 years old. Any information will be appreciated by Danny Monahan, 354 Water St., Leominster, Mass.

I would like to inquire about William Breese, Paul Dees, and Jakie Marlow with whom I served in the 12th Photo Section, France Field, Canal Zone. Please contact James C. Long, San. Eng., N. J. State Hospital, Greystone Park, N. J.

Roscoe Pinney, who served in the First World War with the 81st Toronto Battalion, wounded, gassed and shell-shocked, discharged June 1919 at Toronto. Last seen in Sheridan, Wyoming in 1920. Supposed to have been in Youngstown, Ohio in 1933. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please write his father, Guy C. Pinney, Sr., 490 Morningside St., North Long Beach, Calif.

Francis Charles Aitkens, R.C.A.F., would like news of John Dowrie (Mick) Roberts. He was born in Dublin about 1891, went overseas with the Canadian Artillery from Victoria October, 1915, and returned in 1921. He worked in Clinton, B.C., then was a storekeeper in Victoria. In 1926 he went to California where he worked at Petaluma. The last address was Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, in 1938. Please communicate with Sqdn. Ldr. F. C. Aitkens, Box L-160, R.M.D.4, Victoria, B.C. Canada.

I am trying to locate my buddy, Norman Proper. He was on the *S. S. Minotaur*, *S. S. Matonian*, and the *S. S. Esso Baytown*. His hometown is Denver, Colo., and he is 6' 2" tall, weighing about 165 lbs. He has brown hair. He was last heard of in Port Aransas, Texas. William Quinn, 3314 Waterloo Place, Dallas, Texas.

W. H. McCarty, 965 Clinton St., Napa, California wants information of his two brothers, A. W. McCarty, whose nickname is "Buck," and W. F. McCarty, sometimes called "Bill."

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Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur Micue or Matthews, please write N. F. Preo, 3000 S. Lawndale Ave., Chicago 23, Ill. He enlisted from Maine in the U. S. Army, served in Texas and Mexico with the cavalry against Villa about 1917-1918.

I would appreciate any help in finding George Van Denworker. He would be about 80 years old now. He raised my wife's father, George A. Van Denworker, along with three other boys, one of whom was his own. The family last heard from him in 1935 when he was in San Francisco. Please contact Laurence C. Buck, 317½ N. Maine St., Ellensburg, Washington.

Information wanted about Lt. Gene Manghi, O-1641540, 56th Signal Battalion, who wrote me from Czechoslovakia regarding my article on hybrid oak crop trees published in *Popular Science*, April, 1945. Any knowledge of him should be forwarded to Thomas Q. Mitchell, 1564 Broadway, New York, N. Y., c/o BILLBOARD.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of my son, Hercules McClain, veteran of World War I, last heard of at 519½ South Daley St., Los Angeles, Calif., engaged in landscape gardening at that time, 1932, please write to his brother, William D. Meeks, Apt. 1, 102 Palmetto Dr., Pasadena 4, Calif.

I want to contact Stephen Kolowski from Chicago who was on the Secretary of Navy's yacht and the Receiving Station in Washington. Also Joe Vieditch who was on the old Reuben James 245 in 1920—and William Jennings Bryan Guest from St. Louis who was on the old battleship, the New Jersey. Would also like to find William Wischehtch from the Naval Magazine in Coco Solo and Naval Air Station along with William Henry Hanna Hurst from New Orleans who was on the old Flusser 289 in 1920. Please write L. W. Fraser, CGM, USN, 16th Fleet Staff, Orange, Texas.

I would appreciate any information about Frank and Fred Reed of New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The last known of Frank, he was still in Pennsylvania and Fred was somewhere on the West Coast. Anyone knowing of either Frank's or Fred's whereabouts, please write to M. M. Mausser, R.F.D. No. 1, Bernard, Iowa.

I should like to locate Vernie Baldwin, 35 years old, lived in Live Oak and Jacksonville, Florida, in 1928 and early in the 30's. He is related to John Sterling and is the son of B. O. Baldwin. Please write J. E. Cross, P. O. Box 61, Live Oak, Fla.

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